

# Spring 2017

'I think Wigmore Hall is the greatest jewel in London, and I have yet to find an acoustic abroad that is as good.' Sarah Connolly, mezzo-soprano

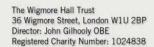
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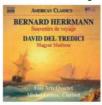
# GRAMOPHONE SOUNDS OF AMERICA

A special eight-page section focusing on recent recordings from the US and Canada

#### **Del Tredici · Herrmann**

Del Tredici Magyar Madness<sup>a</sup> Herrmann Souvenirs de voyage<sup>b</sup> Michel Lethiec C/ Fine Arts Quartet

Naxos American Classics ® 8 559796 (69' • DDD) Recorded live at the Abbaye Saint Michel de Cuxa, Prades, France, bAugust 3, 2013, aJuly 27, 2015



Bernard Herrmann's innovative and profound film scores continue to overshadow

his considerable accomplishments in the concert music arena. Written in 1967, Souvenirs de voyage for clarinet quintet was his final concert composition, and it's a beauty. Given the composer's reputation as an ardent Anglophile, one readily reads the influence of Vaughan Williams's bardic lyricism and lush textures in the opening movement, inspired (coincidentally or not) by AE Housman's poem 'On Wenlock Edge'. Yet its angular imitative writing and moments of sparser scoring reveal Herrmann going his own decisive way. The central movement's aching harmonies and downward melodic phrases belie its Berceuse subtitle; this music will not lull any baby to sleep! Perhaps the violin duet at the finale's start is a tad cloving, but the music starts to get interesting once the swirling scherzando writing at 2'28" kicks in, along with the Berlioz influence that Herrmann so brilliantly internalised. Clarinettist Michel Lethiec prefers tonal variety to uniformity, and he is not afraid to bring an occasional astringent edge to a curvaceous melody or extra heft to low sustained notes in support of string solos. The Fine Arts Quartet respond in kind in a live performance that is less suave and controlled than the Tippett Quartet with clarinet soloist Julian Bliss, yet more edgily inflected.

In contrast to Herrmann's reserve, David Del Tredici's brand of hyper-Romanticism holds nothing back. *Magyar Madness*'s first movement serves up heaps of counterpoint, accelerated repeated phrases, wild runs and Richard Straussian harmonic tricks. Contrary to the composer, I hear nothing 'lyrical and contented' or 'sweetly ardent'

## GRAMOPHONE talks to...

## Amara Piano Quartet

The Iowa-based ensemble talk about their all-American debut disc

#### What inspired the inventive programme?

When our pianist Mei-Hsuan Huang joined us in 2012 she brought her knowledge of Tsontakis's music, and we've performed the Third Quartet since 2013. When Fleur de Son asked for groups to submit their ideas and performances for the label's consideration, a competition of sorts, we were among the winning ensembles, and the Tsontakis was our first choice of repertoire. Between the four of us, we knew the remaining works, and we felt they balanced the selection.

## Do these pieces have common features that might define them as 'American'?

Although there is no single 'American' element - this music reflects an eclectic mix of styles - there's nothing more American than a melting pot. Two of the pieces use musical quotations (Schoenfield quotes an American popular song, Hoiby uses a melody by the Irish author James Joyce).



Three of the pieces use extended harmonies and have moments of atonality - Hoiby's music is harmonically the most conservative, Tsontakis's probably the most adventurous. The listener gets something of a kaleidoscope, which is both fascinating and liberating.

#### You seem to enjoy exploring repertoire.

With relatively few established masterpieces in the piano quartet repertoire, we love finding lesser-known pieces. This can be a bit like a treasure hunt - you never know what gems lie forgotten on a library shelf.

#### What are your future plans?

We are very excited to be recording the Fauré piano quartets next, in the spring of 2017.

about the strings-only second movement. Instead I'd call it 'late Beethoven on steroids'. The latter drugs take full effect in the 25-minute-plus Grand rondo à la hongrois finale, where the thematic statements grow increasingly elaborate and the brilliant clarinet part's leaping cadenzas, with their deliberate 'wrong note' landing points and fiery scales, sound like two instruments fighting it out. However, Del Tredici provides enough moments of calm before each successive virtuoso storm. Naxos claims this live performance to be a first recording but a studio version by the work's original commissioners, clarinettist David Krakauer and the Orion Quartet, actually appeared in print first. While Lethiec capably commands his part, he yields to Krakauer's more incisive

phrasing, superior intonation and vivid sense of character, and the Orion Quartet benefit from closer, more detailed engineering, in contrast to the present recording's overly reverberant acoustic. Jed Distler

Herrmann – selected comparison: Bliss, Tippett Qt (6/11) (SIGN) SIGCD234 Del Tredici – selected comparison: Krakauer, Orion Qt (EONE) EOMCD7786

#### Greco

Geografías del silencio<sup>a</sup>. In Passing<sup>b</sup>.

Off with its Head!<sup>c</sup>. Swallow<sup>d</sup>

<sup>b</sup>Ellen Corver, <sup>a</sup>Duncan Gifford pf <sup>b</sup>Jan

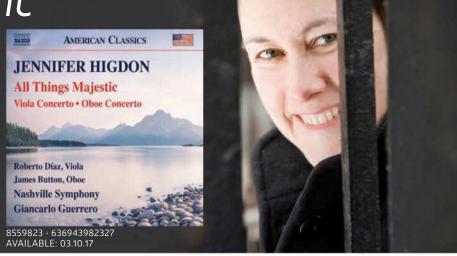
Kouwenhoven ob/cor ang <sup>b</sup>Peter Brunt vn <sup>b</sup>Arjen
Uitenbogaard vc <sup>c</sup>Enigma Ensemble / Klaus
Simon; <sup>d</sup>Netherlands Wind Ensemble; <sup>a</sup>Czech
National Symphony Orchestra / Adrian Leaper





...a savvy, sensitive composer with a keen ear, an innate sense of form and a generous dash of pure esprit."

THE WASHINGTON POST

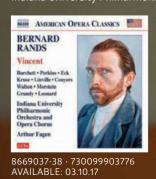




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- THE BOSTON GLOBE













'Characterful sparkle': Jasmin Arakawa plays Haydn, Schumann and Scriabin - a programme redolent of Horowitz

Naxos American Classics (M) 8 559816 (71' • DDD) Recorded live at the <sup>d</sup>Concertgebouw, Amsterdam, November 8, 1992; <sup>a</sup>Church of Simon and Judas, Prague, November 13, 2007; <sup>c</sup>Zaragoza Auditorium, Spain, February 22, 2011



New York City-born José Luis Greco, now living in Madrid, enjoys the company of world-

class musicians from Amsterdam, Prague and Zaragoza, Spain, in four premiere recordings.

The highlight of the disc is Greco's deliriously surreal *Swallow*, written in 1992 for pairs of oboes, clarinets, bassoons and horns plus piano, and played with intoxicating style by the Netherlands Wind Ensemble, live in concert at the Concertgebouw a week after the world premiere. Inspired by the daily sunrise bursts of a 'squadron of sparrows' outside his rooftop studio while living in Amsterdam along a canal, Greco threw a toolkit of sounds at his musical aviary, from low bass throbbings to audaciously light-hearted woodwind triplets.

The highly entertaining *Off with its Head!*, one of Harpsichords Unlimited's more than 40 commissions for Elaine Comparone and The Queen's Chamber Band – explaining the instrumentation of woodwinds,

percussion, strings and harpsichord – was recorded at its premiere by the Enigma Ensemble from the Chamber Orchestra of Zaragoza. With its edgy, retro urban energy – think the Sharks and the Jets – it sounds like music for cartoons yet to be made.

Geografias del silencio, the title-track, is an epic yet intimate response to the long sea voyages of the illustrious Italian navigator Alessandro Malaspina in the form of a 25-minute Romantic piano concerto, brilliantly virtuoso to the end. The lone studio recording on the CD is of *In Passing*, which posits oboe/cor anglais, violin, cello and piano to be a compelling chamber ensemble and proves it with writing that shows off each instrument, alone and in stunning combinations. Laurence Vittes

#### Haydn · Schumann · Scriabin

'Klavierabend'
Haydn Piano Sonata, HobXVI/52
Schumann Fantasie, Op 17
Scriabin Piano Sonata No 3, Op 23
Jasmin Arakawa pf
MSR Classics ® MS1619 (68' • DDD)

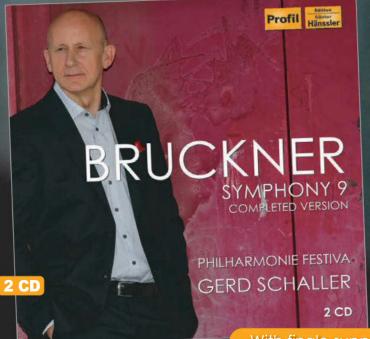


A graduate of the Indiana University Jacobs School of Music and a faculty member at the University of South Alabama, Jasmin Arakawa has a long and varied résumé of solo, concerto and chamber performances worldwide. Her first solo CD offers three large-scale works that are amply represented in the catalogue, and, in fact, happen to be mainstays of Vladimir Horowitz's discography. Arakawa brings pronounced dynamic contrasts and varied articulation to the first movement of Haydn's great final E flat Sonata, although her basic tempo gradually settles into something slower than she originally sets out. The Adagio is meticulously executed but with little sense of flow and long line, but the pianist's characterful sparkle and wittily pinpointed staccatos in the Presto finale compensate.

There are more ardently singing, grandly rhetorical and imaginative treatments of the Schumann Fantasie's first movement compared with Arakawa's forthright literalism. That said, one must acknowledge her sharp attention to the composer's swirling and often vaguely shaped lefthand writing. The central march movement's obsessive dotted rhythms and knotty counterpart are astutely voiced and gauged, yet Arakawa turns shy and prosaic when it comes to the coda's treacherous leaps. Arakawa's rubato throughout the finale has more of a wandering than a shapely quality to it, notwithstanding beautiful quiet moments.



**Conductor Gerd Schaller** receives the Bruckner Medal of the American Bruckner Society.

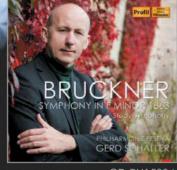


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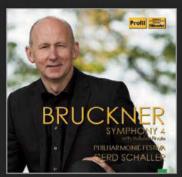
With finale supplemented from original sources and completed by Gerd Schaller



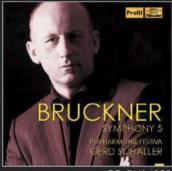
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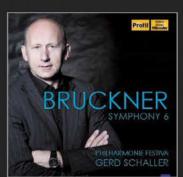
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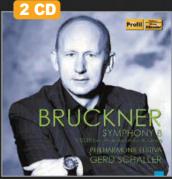
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Emotionally speaking, I suspect that Arakawa most readily connects with Scriabin's Third Sonata. Her melodyplaying doesn't palpitate like (you guessed it) Horowitz, but the volatile dynamics, the restless inner voices and the unsettled ebb and flow of ideas in the outer movements come across convincingly. If only the recorded sound were warmer and fuller-bodied; the piano's metallic patina in louder moments causes instant aural fatigue.

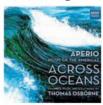
Jed Distler

#### **T** Osborne

And the Waves Sing Because They Are Moving. Dreams of Sky and Sea. Like Still Water. Songs of a Thousand Autumns

#### Aperio

MSR Classics F MS1494 (61' • DDD)



Each of these Thomas Osborne premiere recordings references the sea; written in

Los Angeles and Honolulu between 2004 and 2012, each is exquisitely played and sung, and explores in delicately charged detail 'the watery horizon' while 'seeking what lies beyond'.

The four works are also united by the alchemical means Osborne brings to combining words, meaning and sounds in short poems and intimate lyrics concerned with matters of the heart; he makes this clear in the resonant opening bars of *Like Still Water*, in which piano and crystal glasses filled with water initiate a high-level deconstructed dialogue that culminates in a compelling final minute of basically silence.

Words and music in Osborne's two songcycles are similarly integrated – with a difference. *Dreams of Sky and Sea*, focused on beauty and barriers, longing, sadness and joy, is set to objective Korean verses that evoke a purer, less emotional beauty, although the impact can still be devastating, as in soprano Tracy Satterfield's outcry at the end of 'Though the sun is sinking at the mountain crest'.

By contrast, *Songs of a Thousand Autumns*, set to potent texts by two ninth-century poets (one the author of *The Pillow Book*), is a deeply subjective cycle of great fragility which places Satterfield's command of pitch and line against some gorgeous writing for violin, viola, cello and piano, before erupting in a restrained tsunami. Set between the two, Osborne's riveting 12-minute *And the Waves Sing Because They Are Moving*, inspired by lines by the poet Philip Larkin, gives Jason

Hardink a chance to show off his impressively wide range and command. **Laurence Vittes** 

#### Rakowski

Stolen Moments<sup>a</sup>. Piano Concerto No 2<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Sarah Bob, <sup>b</sup>Amy Briggs *pf*Boston Modern Orchestra Project / Gil Rose

BMOP/sound © BMOP1048 (70' • DDD/DSD)



Although the ambitious symphonic works on David Rakowski's second release by

the Boston Modern Orchestra Project were written in Europe, each has a distinctly American enthusiasm and expertise, as do Gil Rose's excellent performances with the BMOP band and the remarkable booklet-notes by both the composer and Hayes Biggs.

In fact, BMOP commissioned the Piano Concerto No 2, which Rakowski meant as a 'gigantic, monster piano concerto' and wrote while enjoying the scenery and fruits of Cassis on the Mediterranean coast, where he munched on 'the healthy farmer's market food, the inexpensive boxed rosé and the pepperoni pizza potato chips'.

The music itself is less than gigantic, even at more than 42 minutes long, and turns out to be more impulsive and fascinated by moods and sounds than most monsters, enhanced by the wonderful spatial quality of the recording. The second movement pays tribute to Rakowski's teacher and mentor Milton Babbitt: the opening cor anglais solo takes its row from Babbitt's *A Solo Requiem*.

After Rakowski wrote his more intimate *Stolen Moments* for 10 instruments at the Civitella Ranieri Foundation in Umbria in 2008, studded with gorgeous moments such as the trombone solo in the second movement, he arranged the version recorded here at the request of another ensemble of notable attitude and chops, the US Marine Chamber Orchestra. If you are into piano études and want more of Amy Briggs, Rakowski has not only written 100 such pieces but Bridge has issued the fourth volume in its complete recording – played by Briggs. It's a small world if you're a Rakowski fan.

Laurence Vittes

#### Szymanowski

Piano Sonata No 1, Op 8. Mazurkas, Op 50 - excs Sang Mi Chung pf
Centaur ® CRC3460 (64' • DDD)



Mention Poland and piano music, and the name Chopin inevitably pops up.

But another Polish pianist-composer also excelled in the genre: Karol Szymanowski (1882-1937), who was inspired by his famous predecessor even as he carved a distinctive niche for himself. On her new recording, pianist Sang Mi Chung performs Szymanowski works from two periods in the composer's career: the First Piano Sonata (1903-04) and 14 of the 20 Mazurkas (1924-25).

The Sonata is a luxurious paean to Romanticism, with robust themes and dense harmonies pointing to previous masters, including Chopin. Szymanowski's free compositional spirit is also evident, especially in the finale's three-voice fugue. Like Chopin, he was an imposing pianist, as the work's difficulties indicate. Chung gives the sonata a richly detailed and expressive account, savouring the intimate writing with the same purposeful intensity she applies to the extrovert gestures.

The Mazurkas also have hints of you-know-who, while heading in daring structural and harmonic directions. Szymanowski stretched the bounds of tonality, not through serial techniques but by adding spicy flavours that captivate the ear. The Mazurkas are concise and direct, establishing their diverse personalities and saying as much as Szymanowski deems they need to say.

Chung's poetic and generous playing of these miniatures advocates for their presence on recital programmes. It would be exciting to hear her in Szymanowski's powerful *Symphonie concertante* (Symphony No 4), his final work in the form, which places the orchestra and solo piano on equal footing. **Donald Rosenberg** 

#### **V** Thomson

Four Saints in Three Acts	
Sarah Pelletier sop	St Teresa I
Gigi Mitchell-Velasco mez	St Teresa II
Aaron Engebreth bar	St Ignatius
Lynn Torgrove mez	Commère
Tom McNichols bass	Compère
Deborah Selig sop	St Settlement
Charles Blandy ten	St Chavez
Stanley Wilson ten	St Stephen

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> ANNA NETREBKO AND YUSIF EYVAZOV (3 March 2017)

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The Boston Modern Orchestra Project and conductor Gil Rose perform Virgil Thomson's opera Four Saints in Three Acts

#### 



Trying to make sense of *Four Saints in Three Acts* in narrative terms is an exercise in futility.

As engaging as Gertrude Stein's libretto often sounds, the words never add up to anything that illuminates their implications (or much else: the 22-member cast includes 19 saints, and the opera is in four acts). But even as you're scratching your head to figure out what it all means, Virgil Thomson's gleaming music constantly persuades you to stick around.

The score is a touching amalgam of Americana and hymn influences, with tuneful lines, bright colours and rhythmic urgency keeping the ear eager to experience what happens next. *Four Saints* is a challenging work to stage, given its ambiguous messages, so removing the theatrical trappings allows the listener to concentrate on Thomson's buoyant achievement.

The Boston Modern Orchestra Project's splendid recording gives the music every chance to shine. Gil Rose conducts a performance at once elegant and vibrant, and his players are keenly alert to the score's varied atmospheres. As elusive as Stein's text

may be, the singers do their utmost – and handsomely – to make sure the words are crystal clear, both in solo and ensemble passages. The cast is excellent from vocal top to bottom.

Filling out the two-disc set is another Thomson-Stein creation, *Capital Capitals* for four male voices and piano. A conversation between four French cities in Provence, the piece is more effective for its clever wordplay than for its musical content. Even so, this new performance is a dandy. **Donald Rosenberg** 

#### 'American Piano Quartets'

Hoiby Dark Rosaleen Piston Quartet Schoenfield Carolina Reveille Tsontakis Piano Quartet No 3 Amara Piano Quartet

Fleur de Son F FDS58035 (67' • DDD)



The Amara Piano Quartet makes its recording debut with this superb disc of

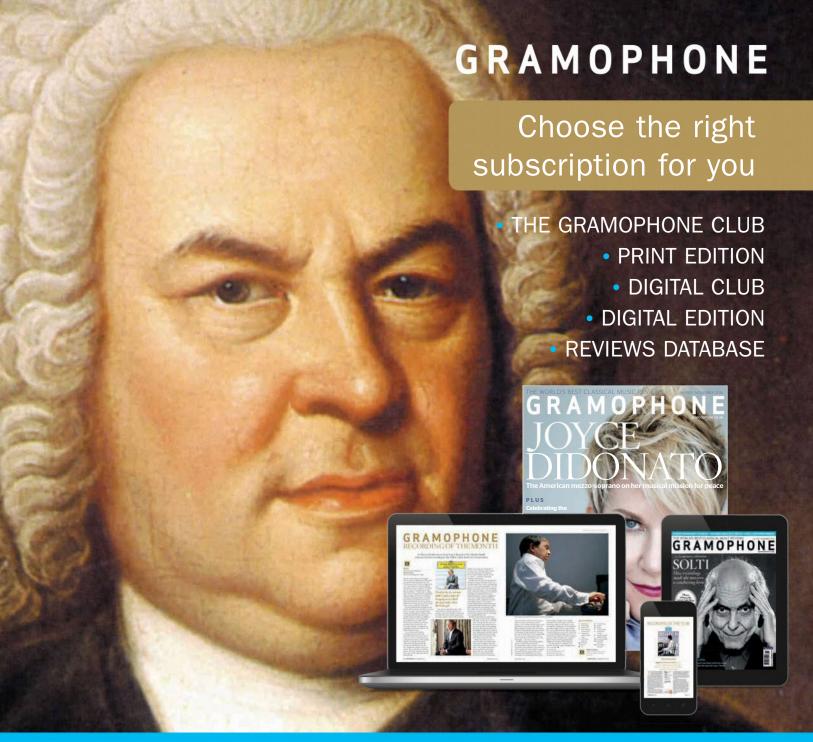
quartets by American composers. Known for more than three decades as the Ames Piano Quartet, the Iowa-based ensemble renamed itself when violinist Borivoj Martinić-Jerčić and pianist Mei-Hsuan Huang joined forces with former Ames viola player Jonathan Strum and cellist George Work. The musicians are clearly all on the same artistic wavelength in terms of seamless interplay and adventurous programming.

It's likely that the four pieces presented here, which the Amara play with vibrant and sensitive expressivity, are known mainly by groups that perform them, but the music deserves a broader audience. Each makes compelling and affecting statements within accessible yet often inventive frameworks.

The three movements of George Tsontakis's Piano Quartet No 3 (2005) make a vast emotional journey, moving from dark corners to more spirited terrain. Paul Schoenfield's *Carolina Reveille* teases with insistent rhythms and thematic titbits until it finally reveals the source of its vivacious personality, the 1922 song 'Carolina in the morning'. Another work can claim an even more surprising source: Lee Hoiby's *Dark Rosaleen* has the subtitle *Rhapsody on an Air of James Joyce*. The Irish writer set an original theme on a Gaelic poem that Hoiby portrays in music of sweeping, turbulent and tender persuasion.

Expert craftsmanship marks every moment in Walter Piston's three-movement Quartet, one of his last works, but so do dramatic fervour and grace. As in all of the disc's fare, the Amara musicians invest the score with exceptional commitment and polish.

Donald Rosenberg



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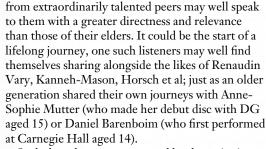
# GRAMOPHONE Founded in 1923 by Sir Compton Mackenzie and Christopher Stone as 'an organ of candid opinion for the numerous possessors of gramophones'

Classical music is right to champion the young

here's an understandable, and important, tendency in classical music to place great emphasis on the past. This is true both in terms of repertoire - the bulk of what we hear on disc and in the concert hall having been written many years, often centuries, before - and in terms of artists. Historic recordings reveal great riches about the interpretations of performers no longer with us, and indeed about their eras. Music, like all art forms, ties generations together in both directions, and recording is the perfect bond.

But it is to music's great credit that the support and nurturing of the young and the new has always been of immense importance too. This is particularly true with artists, and with recording.

In recent months we've seen signings from major labels of very young artists. This month saw Warner Classics's signing of 17-year-old trumpeter Lucienne Renaudin Vary, while last year also saw Decca sign 17-year-old cellist Sheku Kanneh-Mason and 16-year-old recorder player Lucie Horsch, and DG sign 15-year-old violinist Daniel Lozakovich. These are soloists at early stages of their career, and one hopes – and expects – repertoire and career progress will be carefully considered so as to enable them to grow into truly profound artists. It's easy to knock such signings as being about the pursuit of the youth market. To which the correct reply can only be to judge the results (Lucie Horsch's disc, for example, was well received last month), and also to say that there is much to be praised in trying to engage teenage audiences in classical music: performances



Such thoughts were prompted by these signings, and by the change of year when, encouraged by an arbitrary numerical moment, we tend to turn from reflecting on the past to looking ahead. But they were also prompted by the process of selecting this month's Editor's Choices. I'm not quite sure what constitutes youth these days, but if life is very long, then a significant number of this month's most extraordinary recordings certainly came from the younger generation destined to define tomorrow's musical world. To hear Liszt's Hungarian Rhapsodies explored so masterfully by the 31-year-old pianist Vincenzo Maltempo is inspiring. Pablo Heras-Casado – at 39 still young for a conductor certainly! – receives Recording of the Month for a truly impressive performance of Tchaikovsky's Symphony No 1. And then there is the debut disc by Jamie Barton, winner of 2013's Cardiff Singer of the World, a quite beautiful voice of which we can only look forward to hearing more. Looking forward, then: for classical music, at least, the future feels bright.

martin.cullingford@markallengroup.com

#### THIS MONTH'S CONTRIBUTORS



'I jumped at the opportunity to interview Christian Gerhaher', says HUGO SHIRLEY. 'He an artist

who brings special intelligence to his carefully chosen opera roles. The same intelligence and integrity shone through during our interview, making it a fascinating and stimulating encounter.'



'The flute sonatas have fascinated me ever since I enjoyed playing the melodies at school', savs

'When I studied them at university I realised how much more they were than just beautiful tunes. To survey all the wonderful recordings of them for Gramophone has felt more like luxury than work.'



'Music, like politics, is the art of the possible, but I'm continually drawn back to electronics

because technology can reveal music impossible to create acoustically', says PHILIP CLARK. 'I wanted to highlight that electronic music can be deeply humane and emotionally aware.'

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#### **MY MUSIC**

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# Classical. Jazz. ODRADEK

A label by artists, for artists.

Exceptional pianist Rinaldo Zhok interprets refined yet vibrant chamber works by the father of Spanish film music, Jesus García Leoz



Hailing from Italy, Rinaldo Zhok has recently been living in the musically fertile region of Navarre, Spain, where he became fascinated by the music of Jesus García Leoz (1904-1953). Zhok has explored a wealth of his music for solo piano, and for piano and violin, a selection of which is presented on this unmissable disc. Rinaldo Zhok's debut disc on Odradek, of Liszt's Verdi transcriptions, was praised by BBC Music Magazine: "... breathes quality in every department... with technical command to spare... Zhok excels..." Rinaldo Zhok regularly performs in a piano duo with Artur Pizarro, releasing an outstanding disc of Dvořák's music on Odradek, and is joined on this new disc by violinist Lilia Donkova.

Boasting a breathtaking array of repertoire, French Connection takes listeners on a tour of Gallic music composed or adapted for saxophone and piano



The first saxophone record owned by Guido Bäumer was a collection of French music. He became so enthralled by it that he decided to become a classical saxophonist. Now this process comes full circle as, with pianist Aladár Rácz, he pays tribute to the music which so caught his imagination – and changed the course of his life. This two-disc set is the second Odradek release from this duo following the success of their debut disc, Flashback (ODRCD331). Many of the works on this collection belong to or are related to impressionism, including stunning pieces by Debussy, Schmitt and Jolivet. There is also music from composers such as Milhaud, who rejected and moved beyond impressionism, alongside works of the earlier, more Romantic French school.







#### The other side of Giaches de Wert

Giaches de Wert is best known for his madrigals – the perfect bridge between the polyphony of the high Renaissance and the new style of Monteverdi. Stile Antico's new album introduces us to another side of this composer who, though Flemish-born, spent most of his life in Italy, primarily in Mantua. The unique and dramatic style of these remarkable motets cannot fail to ravish explorers of this, 'divine theatre'.

# GRAMOPHONE Editor's choice



**Cullingford's** pick of the finest recordings from this month's reviews





#### **TCHAIKOVSKY**

Symphony No 1, 'Winter Daydreams'. The Tempest Orchestra of St Luke's / Pablo Heras-Casado Harmonia Mundi ► PETER **OUANTRILL'S REVIEW IS ON** PAGE 26

Pablo Heras-Casado has emerged as a conductor of perceptive insight and great talent: Tchaikovsky's Symphony No 1 is not a work usually associated with making a statement, but this is a fascinating listen.



SCHUBERT String Quartet No 15, D887. Quartettsatz, D703 **Doric Quartet** Chandos The Doric Quartet

continue to build their impressive catalogue on Chandos with a Schubert disc that well demonstrates the rapport that is this ensemble's hallmark.

► REVIEW ON PAGE 54



**LISZT** Complete Hungarian Rhapsodies Vincenzo Maltempo pf Piano Classics Already acclaimed in these pages for

his performances of Alkan, the young pianist Vincenzo Maltempo offers exceptionally fine interpretations of these virtuoso masterpieces.

► REVIEW ON PAGE 64



**SCHUMANN** Dichterliebe, etc Mauro Peter ten Helmut Deutsch pf Sony Classical This tenor-and-

pianist partnership follow their 2015 Schubert success with a Schumann recital of strongly communicative power and personality.

▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 77



C SIMPSON The Four Seasons Sirius Viols

Deutsche Harmonia Mundi A recording of beautiful music - by

17th century English composer and violist Christopher Simpson - given delightful and fresh-feeling performances by Sirius Viols, full of character.

▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 54



**'BACH TO THE FUTURE. VOL 2'** Fenella Humphreys vn Champs Hill Records This is part two of an ambitious mission

to expand the solo violin repertoire with some beguiling new works from British composers, in this case Sally Beamish, Peter Maxwell Davies and Adrian Sutton.

▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 67



'ALL WHO WANDER' Jamie Barton mez Brian Zeger pf Delos A significant debut

recording from the winner of 2013's Cardiff Singer of the World, and one which whets appetites for what may lie ahead from this wonderful voice and impressive talent.

▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 79



BLOCH. LIGETI. DALLAPICCOLA Works for Solo Cello Natalie Clein Hyperion A wonderful and

compelling recording by Natalie Clein demonstrating the art of cello-playing at its most intimate - physical, lyrical and beautifully recorded.

► REVIEW ON PAGE 62



'ENCORES AFTER **BEETHOVEN'** András Schiff pf **ECM New Series** Another recording serious, engaging and

thoughtful throughout - which firmly lays to rest the reputation of the 'encore' as a genre of lightweight and light-hearted lollipops.

► REVIEW ON PAGE 68



MASCAGNI Guglielmo Ratcliff

Sols; Wexford Festival Opera / Francesco Cilluffo RTÉ Lyric FM 'An essential

discovery', says our reviewer Mark Pullinger of this revelatory gem from the Wexford Festival, sung and played with real conviction and class.

▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 90



**REISSUE/ARCHIVE** DIAMOND. HARRIS. **HILL** Symphonies

Boston SO / Koussevitzky Pristine Audio

Koussevitzky conducting the premiere of Harris's Symphony No 5:

'an important release', writes Rob Cowan. ► REVIEW ON PAGE 97



Listen to many of the Editor's Choice recordings online at

qobuz.com

**DVD/BLU-RAY** 

ELGAR, LIGETI, STRAVINSKY, WAGNER Sol Gabetta VC Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra / Sir Simon Rattle EuroArts

Two releases offer us Sol Gabetta's Elgar Cello Concerto with Rattle this month, and both are highly recommended - a Sony CD and this Euroarts DVD.

► REVIEW ON PAGE 32

# FOR THE RECORD



Dame Evelyn Glennie became a Companion of Honour in the 2017 New Year Honours list

# New Year Honours for Dame Evelyn Glennie, Bryn Terfel and Iestyn Davies

everal classical musicians were recognised in the 2017 New Year Honours list, including a knighthood for Bryn Terfel and an MBE for Iestyn Davies.

Dame Evelyn Glennie became a Companion of Honour, which is conferred by the Queen on a very select group of outstanding individuals there are only 65 at any given time. Fellow Companions include Dame Janet Baker (1993) and Sir Harrison Birtwistle (2000). Glennie said she felt 'deeply honoured and humbled to receive this esteemed award which came as a complete surprise to me. I count myself blessed to be amongst such an eminent list of recipients for such a distinguished award. As a musician I am proud to represent the arts in this way. I also hold dear the responsibility of such a respected title which I take very seriously. I will do my best to ensure my work and legacy continues to help empower people around the world to truly listen.'

Bryn Terfel received a knighthood for services to music, as did the Principal of the Guildhall School of Music & Drama, Professor Barry Ife, and the conductor Jeffrey Tate, who was recognised for services to British music overseas. Terfel said that 'this is something I will hopefully carry with pride, and think it might help some young singers to achieve something – and to dream – and that is something very important'.

The countertenor Iestyn Davies was awarded an MBE. He told the *Financial Times* that when he informed his father of the news, 'I could hear on the phone that he was crying with joy'. He explained: 'My Mum died two years ago, and she would have been so happy; she was the kind of person who used to google me every day and she would print out all my reviews, even the terrible ones. So when I told my Dad, we both felt this sense that it's a shame she's not here to know.'

Lennox Mackenzie, violinist and chairman of the LSO, and Stephen Maddock, chief executive of the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, were awarded OBEs. Anthony Forbes, chairman of the Royal Choral Society, was recognised with an MBE.

#### New label, Rubicon Classics, to focus on young performers

atthew Cosgrove has quite a record-label pedigree, having been a senior executive at EMI, Warner and Deutsche Grammophon, and General Manager of the independent label Onyx since 2009. Now Cosgrove has launched Rubicon Classics, which intends to focus on young performers. Cosgrove says: 'Rubicon Classics is about taking risks...Every label has its share of young artists, of course, but young artists will be at the heart of

## IN THE STUDIO

## Crouch End Festival Chorus record St John Passion in English

Bach's St John Passion has been recorded in English for the first time since Benjamin Britten's classic account (with Peter Pears's Evangelist) for Decca some 45 years ago. The new recording for Chandos features Robert Murray as the Evangelist and Ashley Riches as Jesus alongside Crouch End Festival Chorus, Bach Camerata and conductor David Temple.

The recording sessions took place at St Jude-on-the-Hill in Hampstead Garden Suburb, with producer Rachel Smith, and will be released at the end of March.

# BBC Scottish SO record Tippett's symphonies

Martyn Brabbins and the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra have recorded Tippett's First and Second Symphonies for Hyperion with producer Andrew Keener and engineer Simon Eadon.

Brabbins and the BBC Scottish SO made an outstanding recording of Tippett's Piano Concerto with pianist Steven Osborne for Hyperion in 2007, a disc that was shortlisted for a *Gramophone* Award the following year.

#### Petrenko turns to Rachmaninov, Stravinsky and Debussy for Onyx

In recent years Vasily Petrenko and the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra have recorded the complete Tchaikovsky symphonies and piano concertos for what we do. We will, if need be, advise, guide and mentor them every step of the way on the journey from studio to release and beyond.'

The aim is to produce around 12 releases every year, and in its first 18 months will offer new albums from the pianist Danny Driver and violinist Chloë Hanslip, who will record a complete cycle of Beethoven's violin sonatas for the label, and trombonist Peter Moore, who won the BBC Young Musician competition in 2008.

In March, Rubicon will release a new album from the Exon Singers called 'Before the Ending of the Day', which comprises contemporary works for Anglican Evensong.



A St John Passion in English for Chandos

Onyx. Their recording of Symphonies Nos 1, 2 and 5 was an Editor's Choice in August 2016, and Symphonies 3, 4 and 6 will be reviewed in March.

For their next Onyx recording Petrenko and the RLPO turn their attentions to Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*, Rachmaninov's cantata *Spring* and Debussy's *Printemps*. The recordings were made at concerts in Liverpool's Philharmonic Hall last year by producer Andrew Cornall and engineer Philip Siney, and will be released internationally in October.

#### Véronique Gens records French Romantic opera arias album

The soprano Véronique Gens won last year's Solo Vocal *Gramophone* Award for her stunning collection of French songs, 'Néère', with pianist Susan Manoff. She is following up that album with a recording of French Romantic opera arias by Massenet, Halévy, Saint-Saëns, Bizet and others, accompanied by the Munich Radio Orchestra and conductor Hervé Niquet. The new album will be released in June on the Alpha label.

#### Head of Sony Classical Bogdan Roscic to lead the Vienna State Opera

he Austrian Culture Minister, Thomas Drozda, has announced that the next Artistic Director of the Vienna State Opera will be Bogdan Roscic, current President of the classical division of the Sony Music Group. Drozda said that the intention of the appointment was to make the company 'the leading institution of our cultural landscape'.

Roscic will replace Dominique Meyer in Vienna when Meyer's current contract expires in 2020. Interestingly, Roscic's predecessor at Sony, Peter Gelb, followed a similar career path by leaving the company to become the General Manager of the Metropolitan Opera in 2006.

At Sony, Roscic has presided over several eye-catching releases, particularly of operatic repertoire. Teodor Currentzis's cycle of the Mozart/da Ponte operas, recorded in unusually intensive studio conditions in Perm, Russia, has been a particularly important project for Sony. So was the signing of tenor Jonas Kaufmann, who joined Sony from Decca Classics in 2013 (he had been a Decca artist since 2008) and whose recording of Schubert's *Winterreise* with pianist Helmut Deutsch won the 2014 Solo Vocal *Gramophone* Award.

Sony Classical has also shown a commitment to signing young, talented singers under Roscic, including *Gramophone*'s current Young Artist of the Year Benjamin Appl and the sopranos Sonya Yoncheva and Pretty Yende.



Bogdan Roscic: from Sony to Vienna State Opera

# GRAMOPHONE Online

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#### THE GREAT BARITONES

To coincide with Hugo Shirley's revealing interview with Christian Gerhaher (see page 10) we will be celebrating some of the greatest baritones on record, from Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau and Hermann Prey to Gerald Finley (pictured) and Bryn Terfel on the *Gramophone* 



website. With features and interviews drawn from *Gramophone*'s unrivalled archive, plus guides to key recordings, our celebration of the great baritones will begin on January 30 and continue all week. It will of course remain on the *Gramophone* website for you to enjoy subsequently.

Some of the archive highlights of 'Baritone Week' will include the late great *Gramophone* writer John Steane reflecting on little-remembered singers from the past, and a feature in which nine leading baritones of our time talk about which of their forebears they most admire and why.

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hristian Gerhaher meets me in the foyer of a smart Berlin hotel by Potsdamer Platz, just down the road from the Philharmonie. He arrives late after what has clearly been a difficult rehearsal for a performance of *Das Lied von der Erde* with the Berlin Philharmonic under Bernard Haitink the following evening.

The wait had me wondering what to expect from the encounter. After all, this is a man whose artistry seems for many to exist on a different plane from that of other mere mortals – a baritone who has critics dusting off long-dormant superlatives (the *Daily Telegraph* has dubbed him 'the most moving singer in the world') and opera and song lovers queuing for returns. One thing that's clear right from the start, though, as he offers the most profuse and genuine apologies, is that he's an artist to whom prima donna tendencies couldn't be more alien. At one point in our conversation the topic touches briefly on celebrity. 'If you're a "classical star", you

changing the dynamics as they want, imposing their own psychology - and the result is too intimate. It should be more objective, being a bit in awe of the art of the composer.' It doesn't seem as though much has changed in that regard, and it's an approach that has brought him legions of avid admirers, not to mention armfuls of accolades. In 2015 alone, he won a Gramophone Award for his Schubert recital 'Nachtviolen' (his disc of Mahler orchestral songs was runner-up in the same category) as well as the Royal Philharmonic Society's prize for the year's best singer. The last dozen years have seen him collect an impressive clutch of further Editor's Choices and Awards nominations.

While Lieder has always been central to Gerhaher's career, he has complemented such work with oratorio performances and carefully rationed opera roles, including Wolfram in *Tannhäuser* (heard memorably at the Royal Opera House in London), Pelléas, Monteverdi's Orfeo, Don Giovanni, and Rodrigo in *Don Carlo*. The latter he unveiled away from the spotlight in Toulouse in 2013 and is due to be repeated at the Bavarian State

# 'There are singers who use Lieder for their own purposes, and the result is too intimate. It should be more objective' - Christian Gerhaher

are still anonymous', he says, before immediately qualifying his statement: 'A classical star like me, that is. There are bigger stars, like Jonas Kaufmann and Simon Rattle, and they have bigger problems.'

It's an unremarkable statement, but seems in some ways to sum up the tenor of the interview. Throughout, Gerhaher speaks with quiet passion and a mixture of realism and modesty – the modesty never false, the realism never merely modest – that is disarming. I feel a sense of relief as I realise how little difference there seems to be between Gerhaher the man and Gerhaher the singer.

As regards the singer, we can take as read the voice's beauty, even if its special qualities are difficult to pin down – a firmly projected mellifluousness and beguiling purity of tone are a major part of its arsenal, plus a clarity of enunciation that never seems to undermine the smooth *legato* line. But the voice is allied to an approach defined by a firmly held belief that the artist's job is to be servant to the music. Plenty of musicians claim to put the music first; not all make one believe it as fully as Gerhaher does.

In a brief interview in these pages in December 2004, when he was beginning to garner a reputation as one of the finest Lieder singers of his generation, Gerhaher expounded a little of that philosophy: 'There are singers who use Lieder for their own purposes –

Opera in Munich a few months after our October meeting – more Verdi, he has hinted, might lie in the future. Two operatic recital discs, of German Romantic arias and Mozart, have been well received, while his Wolfram is preserved on the recording of *Tannhäuser* in Pentatone's anniversary Wagner cycle. His performance in another new role, Wozzeck, in Andreas Homoki's Zurich Opera production, won him German magazine *Opernwelt*'s Singer of the Year for 2016 – and the DVD release earned him yet another *Gramophone* Editor's Choice in November.

His newest recording, however, takes him back to song, continuing the carefully planned series of releases to have come out on Sony Classical, and before that on associated labels RCA and Arte Nova. It harks back to his early Arte Nova discs in two ways: in featuring just a single cycle, and in returning to Brahms – then it was the *Vier ernste Gesänge*; now it's *Die schöne Magelone*.

Gerhaher's own personal hierarchy of song composers, in which the trinity of Schubert, Schumann and Mahler holds sway, hasn't changed – one future project will be a survey of the complete Schumann songs, masterminded, if not all performed, by Gerhaher and his long-term collaborator, Gerold Huber; his next Sony project is a new recording of *Die schöne Müllerin*. But Brahms holds a special place in his affections. 'He's certainly one of



Christian Gerhaher with Roderick Williams and Mark Padmore in Peter Sellars's staging of Bach's St John Passion at the Berlin Philharmonie in February/March 2014

the major Lieder composers. His music is so very special: so round, dark and so full of...not tiny notes, but rounded, nearly operatic sounds.' Gerhaher is a calm and unrushed communicator with excellent English, but this is one of several instances during our conversation when he has taken time to seek out the right words only to seem faintly disappointed with the result. Later on I get the sense he's more satisfied with his description of some favourite Brahms songs: 'Very, very dark green, fat songs which I adore are "Der Tod,

das ist die kühle Nacht", "Meerfahrt", "Auf dem Kirchhofe" or "An eine Äolsharfe". They are really world-moving.'

'When you sing Brahms it is astonishing: you feel like an instrument. You don't just feel like you're playing a viola, you feel like you *are* a viola! And this is a wonderful feeling. It is very, very sensual; your whole person is made to vibrate, not only the brain.' There are puzzling aspects to the composer, too, Gerhaher notes. 'Brahms was so educated and had read so many books of his time, but he very often chose – seemingly

on purpose – rather weak poems to put to music.'

Die schöne Magelone is intriguing in other ways. Brahms took his text from a Romantic novella by Ludwig Tieck (1773-1853). The poems adorn a medieval shaggy-dog story – a collection of 'inconsequential events and amazing coincidences', in Eric Sams's phrase – that tells of the noble Peter of Provence falling in love with the beautiful Magelone in the face of family opposition, of their elopement, their unlikely separation and their even more unlikely reunion many years later. As a song-cycle, however, it's unusual. 'It is an epic song-cycle', says Gerhaher. 'But it's not like Dichterliebe, or even the Eichendorff Liederkreis or Winterreise, where there's a kind of accumulation of songs with a common image



 $With \ director\ Peter\ Sellars\ and\ Sir\ Simon\ Rattle\ during\ rehears als\ for\ Bach's\ St\ Matthew\ Passion\ in\ Berlin\ in\ 2010$ 

or common theme, even if they're not telling a specific story. The poems of *Die schöne Magelone* don't tell a story at all – they're just descriptions of certain moments in this very odd tale by Tieck, which is a little...' Once more he pauses to choose his words, but this time changes tack. 'A friend of mine is a very important literature professor and he says, "No, no, it is not kitsch, it is a special kind of irony". But I can't see that. It is odd, and weak and kitschy.' The songs themselves show Brahms the song composer at his most sophisticated, though: 'They are incredibly powerful and intense and heavy.'

As the conversation develops, the depth of Gerhaher's knowledge of the repertoire and the thoughtfulness with which he approaches it become clear. The broader issues of the poetry that composers set is one subject, with Gerhaher noting – in contrast to a view often put forward – how many great poems Schubert chose, and emphasising, in particular, the importance of Wilhelm Müller, the poet of Winterreise and Die schöne Müllerin and 'Heine's predecessor'. But he's no apologist: Richard Strauss's early songs he finds 'musically fantastic, but I can't stand some of them'. He quotes the text of 'Zueignung': "Liebe macht die Herzen krank / Habe dank – Love makes hearts sick / Be thankful". What kind of text is this? I don't think a text can be more awful!'

## 'This music doesn't need to be easily understood – there should always be a kind of gap between the work and the audience'

Gerhaher's gentle manner belies his uncompromising honesty, which shines through again when the conversation moves on to how art song, and classical music in general, are presented. 'People are always confronting me with the theory that the art song is disappearing. I just can't agree. I have to admit that the audiences that fill halls for song recitals are maybe not as big as they were in the time of Fischer-Dieskau and Hermann Prey, for example. But I have the feeling that many more young singers are singing this repertoire. Just look at the Schubertiade or Wigmore Hall programmes. It is amazing how many young singers are singing a wide repertoire, and how well received this is.

'Certainly, it is not easy to listen to this music, but many conclude that we must gain young audiences through "edutainment", and this is one of the most horrible things I can imagine – to make it all easier and to make it all flat and trivial, to make it easily digested, like a hamburger. I've got nothing against hamburgers, but only when they are in their place. It is not necessary for this vocal chamber music to be easily understood – there should always remain a kind of gap between the work and the audience. It is like a crystal, where the light comes in but a different light is coming out. Depending on where you're sitting, it's always different.'

I ask him about his own recordings and how such a view can be reconciled with the interpretative snapshot a recording inevitably represents. Here he is a little evasive: he just does all he can, it seems, to make that particular snapshot as good as possible, while trying not to think about the comparisons people make between performances on record and those they hear in the flesh: 'I try to avoid that pressure, because I have a life as well!' And do his own recordings help encourage a wider public engagement? He doesn't like to say: 'Honestly, I have to be reasonable. I don't think there are tens of thousands buying my recordings. It's just a small part of the population.'





Christian Gerhaher making his role debut as Wozzeck, pictured here with Gun-Brit Barkmin as Marie, in Andreas Homoki's production for Zurich in 2015

He mentions his recent book of conversations, *Halb Worte sind's*, *balb Melodie* (Henschel: 2015): 'I mean, it was well received, but by how many people?'

The recordings of others, however, were important to Gerhaher while he was growing up in the small Bavarian town of Straubing, birthplace of Emanuel Schikaneder, librettist of *Die Zauberflöte* and the first to perform another Gerhaher role,



With pianist Gerold Huber, 'the most important musical thing' in Gerhaher's life

Papageno. 'I listened to recordings very intensively when I was young, but not too many. Some I found very fascinating, like Schumann, Bach and some Stravinsky.' He still listens selectively to recordings today: 'I have to understand some repertoire and I have to understand some colleagues.'

Gerhaher's own path towards singing was famously a roundabout one. As a schoolboy, he played the violin and the viola at first – but, he says, 'not in a very good way: I was not very gifted'. Although his dexterity on these instruments was limited, his teacher noted his impeccable intonation and encouraged him to continue with music more generally. He sang in the local oratorio choir and occasionally took on some solos. That the violin teacher in question was the father of Huber gives an idea of how inextricably Gerhaher's musical life is linked with that of his pianist. They left school and moved to Munich at the same time, Huber to study music and Gerhaher to embark on a philosophy degree, initially at least: 'I was too dumb, so swapped to medicine, which was better.'

There, he and Huber decided to start tackling some Lieder together, beginning, inspired by hearing Prey in recital, with *Dichterliebe*. He spent a year away from medical studies, which allowed him to attend the Munich Conservatoire, as well as undertake guest studies with Fischer-Dieskau in Berlin. The great baritone hovers over our whole discussion, although Gerhaher's relationship with him was in some ways not easy – which primarily came down to the difficulty of finding time for singing once his medical studies recommenced. 'I would call him', Gerhaher says, remembering a typical exchange. 'He'd say, "Ja, come this week". "I'm very sorry, I have an exam then." "Ach, well come this week." "Very sorry, another exam!" And he'd say, "OK then, leave it!". These frustrations

culminated in a stern bit of advice: 'Look, Mr Gerhaher, maybe you should become a doctor – that's OK – and sing as a hobby.'

Looking back, Gerhaher is not critical of the older baritone, whom he describes as his idol. 'Maybe he didn't think I was serious enough, or perhaps he was worried about my technique – whether my voice was big enough and all that.' It was hard to take at the time, he tells me, but also represented a challenge, and some years later, once the medical studies were behind him, he sent Fischer-Dieskau a copy of his first disc, *Schwanengesang* on Arte Nova. 'He was so nice: "Oh my God! I didn't expect that", he said. "Sorry I misinterpreted your gift." He was a kind man with Gerold and me.' They met him again for a lesson on *Winterreise* before recording that cycle. As Gerhaher sees it, it was at this point that his professional singing career really started.

Other encounters early in his career were less happy, and Gerhaher recalls a summer course where a teacher told him his singing was beyond salvaging. 'There's the saying, what doesn't kill you makes you stronger. But I don't like this sentence. It's not necessary to develop by not being killed. It's a macho thing. This is maybe part of an artist's life, to be woundable, and in the end to be a wreck of many wounds – exterior wounds as well as wounds of your self, your own expectations, and your neuroticism.'

It becomes clear that his manner on the concert stage, somewhat nervous, timid and unsettled, is no act: it seems

# 'I am kind of between a musician and an actor. In terms of my education, I'm just a physician. I'm not able to explain music'

that Gerhaher takes his art too seriously, asks questions about it too constantly, to be able fully to relax. Those awards crowding his mantlepiece, he admits, are welcome, but he's learnt to 'leave them behind and move on; they are something that mean the past'. Nor do they bring a greater sense of security or self-confidence. 'It doesn't help you one bit', he insists. 'If you're not already self-confident enough, you won't become so through an honour or award.'

It's maybe no coincidence that Gerhaher has recorded Schumann's *Scenes from Goethe's Faust* twice, for as an artist he seems to embody Faustian striving in his artistic endeavours, to share that character's acute awareness of what's still unknown and unachieved. As such, he seems particularly close to his regular collaborators: 'I learnt a lot from Harnoncourt. Herbert Blomstedt, Simon Rattle, Daniel Harding and Bernard Haitink – I adore all of them. They are really what I want: not only baton-possessors, but intellectual guides.' Yet it's the relationship with Huber that has been the most central and constant throughout his career. 'Gerold is for me the most important musical thing, and then maybe, after my wife, he's the most important thing overall...or possibly after my children too', he laughs.

'The main difference between me and these people is that they are real musicians and understand music. I am kind of between a musician and an actor. I'm more text related. In terms of my education, I'm just a physician. I'm not able to explain music.' I make a final attempt, however, to get him to elucidate his own approach to what he performs. Is it largely instinctive for him, then, I ask? 'Yes, originally. But I have certainly, after so many years of singing, developed a kind of regularity of possible connections, which are kind of rules.' He pauses for a second. 'But they are private.' **G**Read our review of Gerbaber's Brahms in the next issue of Gramophone



# PIONERS

For composers from Stockhausen to Skelton, electronic music has provided an opportunity to explore the emotional interior of exterior sounds, argues Philip Clark

lectricity, you might have noticed, is all the rage, and all music today, to a greater or lesser extent, is electronic. That performance you heard last night at Wigmore Hall of Schubert's C major String Quintet likely built on a relationship with the piece that began on disc, where recording engineers had made conscious decisions about where to place microphones. That pop song rippling discreetly in the background of a chain cafe as you settle down with your copy of Gramophone to read this article reminds you of how the sound of popular

music was utterly changed by the emergence of the electric guitar in the mid-1950s; gone was the neat acoustic balance of crooner against big band as in came a carefully staged mix of electric guitars, electric bass and drums. Electricity changed our experience of music and the German philosopher Walter Benjamin, in his 1936 essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, worried that, because of recording, art was now in danger of prostituting its authentic soul; 'its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be' was under threat.

But what of electronic music that aimed to go further than merely messing with our perception of music as it already existed? This article is concerned with a deeper definition of electronic music – electronics pulsating through the imaginations of Edgard Varèse, John Cage, Karlheinz Stockhausen and Pierre Henry, composers whose desire to



Cage: in the 1940s, he argued for an alliance between composers and scientists

invent a whole new vocabulary of sound changed indelibly the relationship between composers and their material, audiences and music, music and recording. Unexpected allegiances emerge. Only one degree of separation takes vou from Ferruccio Busoni to Frank Zappa; the John Cage and Cornelius Cardewinspired British electronic music composer Brian Eno uses his ideas of electronically transformed sound to embed abstract soundscapes inside Bowie's 1977 pop classic Heroes; Richard Skelton, a composer in his forties who has immersed himself

in the fell lands of Northern England, deploys the latest digital technology to capture dark visions of landscape, rebooting a tradition that stretches back to Birtwistle and Vaughan Williams. Meanwhile electronic composers like Klara Lewis, Robert Curgenven, Valerio Tricoli, Francisco López and the anonymous enigma that is Eleh continue to create music that ingeniously redefines concepts of harmony and structure.

For a long while, electronic music existed only as an inkling about what could be achieved rather than presentations of actually realised music. The works now canonised as the first electronic classics – Cage's *Imaginary Landscape No 1*, Pierre Henry and Pierre Schaeffer's *Symphonie pour un homme seul*, Varèse's *Déserts* and *Poème électronique* and Stockhausen's *Gesang der Jünglinge* – would emerge during the 1940s and '50s, the way prepared by decades' worth of speculative theory and imaginative fantasy.

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Pierre Henry, musique concrète pioneer: 'I don't "play" music, I play with sounds...the world of sound dances inside me'

Ferruccio Busoni's book, *Sketch of a New Aesthetic of Music*, was published in 1907, as Mahler was working on his mighty Eighth Symphony and Schoenberg was beginning to piece together his tonality-busting Second String Quartet, and reveals its author to be music's all-seeing, all prophesying Nostradamus. Before Schoenberg had committed his first fully-fledged atonal notes to manuscript paper, Busoni was already dismissing as a false dichotomy the hot-headed debate that would ensue between tonal hardliners and atonal militants. To use atonality as a critique of tonality was to miss the point entirely, he asserted. Harmony had become a slave to equal temperament, his argument continued, and could only be refreshed by subdividing the octave into third- (not

semi-) tones, which raised immediate questions about the ubiquitous status of conventional instruments and music notation. Such instruments were 'fettered by a hundred limitations', and Busoni proposed that new technologies were required to override limitations of tuning, timbre and range. 'I think in the great new music, machines will be necessary', he wrote. 'The full flowering of music at present is frustrated by our instruments.'

Varèse met Busoni when he relocated to Berlin in 1906. In his previous life in Paris, he had studied (with decidedly mixed results) with D'Indy, Roussel, Widor and Massenet, and befriended Debussy, who would prove supportive, but nobody quite stirred his imagination like Busoni.

When, in 1966, Varèse published an article he called The Liberation of Sound, which collated statements made over the previous 30 years, the tone remained unmistakably Busoni-esque. Talk of liberation from 'the arbitrary paralysing tempered system' was straight out of Busoni's Sketch; and Varèse also pressed the importance of using electronic means to subdivide the octave into 'the formation of any desired scale' and conjure into being dynamics, cross-rhythms and extreme registers of low and high which were 'far beyond the present humanpowered orchestra'. He was also interested in 'a sense of sound projection in space by the emission of sound in any part or in many parts of the

hall as may be required by the score', and of lines related in mathematical proportions too intricate for human performers to count. For all the potency of his ideas, Busoni's music remained defiantly old-school. But Varèse turned concept into sound – and perhaps the value of Busoni's ideas were precisely that they remained theoretical, handing Varèse raw data upon which he could work.

Listening to Varèse's *Poème électronique* some 60 years after its unveiling – inside the Philips Pavilion designed by the Modernist architect Le Corbusier at the 1958 Brussels World's Fair, alongside electronic music by Iannis Xenakis – you become aware of how skilfully Varèse distilled a lifetime of thought about electronic music inside a compressed,

disciplined eight-minute structure. On CD one essential is lost; Varèse engineered the piece for a network of speakers that bounced sound around the building, transforming his musical structure into sound that actively journeyed around the space. Rumbling undercurrents of percussion and piano put you in mind of his pioneering 1931 percussion ensemble piece Ionisation; but Varèse devises a context that has nothing to do with the expectations of the concert hall, or of the natural grain of how acoustic instruments breathe, attack or sustain. In the studio Varèse used technology to dive inside objets trouvés; the sound of an aircraft taking off, and of human voices, had their melodic contours



Le Corbusier's Philips Pavilion, where Varèse's Poème électronique was premiered

stretched and kneaded into other shapes and temperaments. Sounds are brutally cut. Brief silences allow the music to inhale. Blasts of pure electronic sine waves – the most basic electronic humming vibration – puncture the surface. Elaborate overlays of multiple sound sources overwhelm the senses. More hectic silence. Then a single piercing velp escapes from the sound mass – a gesture that undresses the music, revealing its naked essence.

The sadness surrounding *Poème électronique* is that Varèse was already 75 when the invitation came to create the piece. Alongside the wedges of collaged tape music inserted inside his 1954 orchestral piece *Déserts*, this would be the only electronic music Varèse completed. Speculating around what might have been achieved had he been handed earlier opportunities proves an irresistible tease, although his legacy inserts itself in unlikely places: Frank Zappa's 1966 debut album Freak Out! contains a tribute to Varèse, then wraps up its loose ends with a raucous, chopped-up, overlaid collage of borrowed recorded music against everyday sounds. A whole 17 years earlier than Poème électronique – in 1941 – John Cage wrote to Varèse, praising a recent article about electronic music. 'I hope your work is established in some laboratory. It certainly should be', he wrote. 'The general lack of audacity, desire to explore, on the part of heads of companies having laboratories is increasingly un-understandable.'

## I try to look for music behind our acoustic environment. The real music often hides behind the surface of life' - Karlbeinz Stockbausen

Cage's letter was part of a campaign to raise funds for the foundation of a centre of experimental music – and of electronic music in particular - in the United States. 'Only through the use of electrical means', Cage reasoned, 'may important advances in the exploration of sound be made'; and later, 'American music will be enlivened and enriched by such exploration and use of new musical materials. These can best be brought about through the cooperation of scientists with a real appreciation of music, and composers with an understanding and appreciation of science'.

The idealism Cage espouses – the notion that an alliance of composers and scientists would liberate music from stuffy classical orthodoxies and herald a brave new world of music – is a recurring trope throughout the evolution of electronic music. An interview I did with Karlheinz Stockhausen in 2000 elicited this intriguing thought about what electronics bring to the party that acoustic instruments can't: 'I have always tried to look for music behind the acoustic environment that we live in – the real music is often hidden behind the surface of life.' These words resonated in sympathy with sentiments expressed in my 2009 interview with another trailblazer of electronic music, French composer and musique concrète pioneer Pierre Henry. The title of Henry's 1997 composition Intérieur/Extérieur became the focus of our discussion, as Henry explained that the 'intérieur' of a sound can only be revealed by recording its 'extérieur', then using the studio to freeze-frame or slow sound down to the point where a composer can reach inside and rearrange its harmonic particles.

The music of Cage, Stockhausen and Henry represents three radically different mid-20th-century ways of perceiving electronic music, but each composer agreed about the need to define a distinct poetic sensibility, fantasy world even, around

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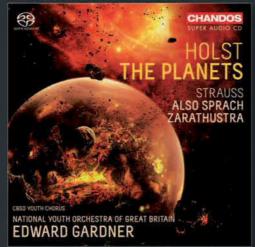






# February Releases

SUPER AUDIO CD IN SURROUND SOUND



## Disc of the Month

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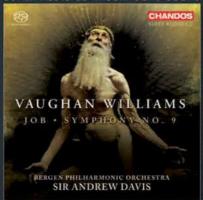
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SUPER AUDIO CD IN SURROUND SOUND



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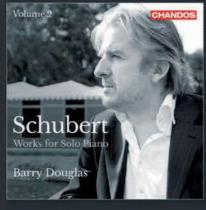
The late Richard Hickox left a precious heritage in the Vaughan Williams discography when he began a projected complete cycle of the composer's symphonies. Sir Andrew Davis, another great authority in British repertoire, has now taken on the challenge of completing the cycle, and here gives idiomatic interpretations of two masterpieces, including the Ninth.



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In Gesang der Jünglinge, Stockhausen uses technology to celebrate the natural beauty and joy inherent in the human voice

this emerging aesthetic. The generosity of vision that had led Busoni towards his *Sketch of a New Aesthetic of Music* would soon be hijacked by the less benevolent Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, whose 1909 *Manifesto of Futurism* spoke of sounds of the future – but also rehearsed ideas of de-humanisation that would reappear in *The Fascist Manifesto* he co-authored in 1914, with Europe tipping towards catastrophe. Cage's letters show a painful awareness of those earlier connotations, while

Stockhausen and Henry, who both experienced wartime Europe first-hand, acted to reclaim electronics as a fresh point of departure.

Stockhausen's Gesang der Jünglinge (1955-56) remains

one of the great humane statements of post-war music, the piece you play to anyone who peddles untruths about all Modernism being cold, clinical and obsessed only with its own materials. Words from the Book of Daniel, sung by a young boy, are dispersed across five separate speakers and, as Stockhausen breaks the words down into single syllables and phonemes, or builds the voice into a lusty choral mass, the music begins to feel joyous and ecstatic. The message is clear: in the Book of Daniel, Nebuchadnezzar throws three Jews into a fiery furnace from which they emerge unharmed and intoning praise to God. Stockhausen uses electronics to heighten that idea; the technology might be new-fashioned, but the celebration of the human voice, and all it could symbolise in post-war Europe, is deeply rooted and fundamental.

Gesang der Jünglinge is regularly cited as electronic music's first masterwork, but Symphonie pour un homme seul ('Symphony for a Man Alone') by Pierre Henry, working in collaboration with the electronic music theorist Pierre Schaeffer, was completed in 1950 and demonstrated that whimsy could also be part of the electronic arsenal. The piece has an absurdist,

playful quality that puts you in mind of Jacques Tati or the French mime tradition. We visit this 'Man Alone' in a sequence of vignettes, each telling us about a particular mood or emotional state. Immediately a divergence of technical approach opens up between Stockhausen and Henry. Stockhausen takes a single source, analyses it, and filters it into a spectrum of tones from which to compose. Henry's music is interested in the *dis*continuity of many different sound sources, recordings of doors slamming, trains hurtling through tunnels and speech patterns creating a jagged web of association. His music also raises the prospect that the slam of a door can, musically, enjoy the same status as an immaculately executed line on a cello: 'To make music I have to make a game out of it', he told me. 'I don't "play" music,

more like I play with my sounds and it's exhilarating because this world of sound dances inside me.'

Henry struck a note of regret as he complained that the emergence of digital technology, of computers and sampling, handed composers preset sounds whereas, back in the day, his music lived or died by the quality of the sounds for which he searched. Is this critique fair? After the war, the establishment of electronic music studios in Cologne, Paris, Milan and

New York scratched the itch for fresh discovery, but objections are often voiced that electronic music squandered its edge when it was sucked into academic institutions at an accelerating rate during the

an accelerating rate during the 1960s. But when the American composer Morton Subotnick released his album *Silver Apples of the Moon* in 1968, it was a moment of reckoning. Gone were tape splices and expensive studio time. Subotnick's music was typical of music conceived on a synthesiser which offered instant access to electronic sound via the touch of a keyboard.

As synthesiser technology developed, electronic music became democratised, versatile and portable. Eighty years after Walter Benjamin expressed his concerns that recording robbed music of its presence in time and space, technology has developed in ways he could never have imagined. Richard Skelton – obsessively stalking the moors, recording his own instrumental improvisations which are mixed with sounds of the environment, and then crafted into imposing structures – plays absorbing games with time, place and space. His transformation of natural sounds heightens their natural curvature and weather-beaten grandeur; they become more than sonic postcards of the place 'it happens to be'. The emotional interior of these exterior sounds is revealed in some of the most beautiful music being created today. **6** 

ds catastrophe. Cage's letters searched. Is this critique fair? After of electronic music studios in Cole.

Henry's music raises the prospect that the

slam of a door can enjoy the same status as an immaculately executed line on a cello



# HILLBORG:

# The Swedish composer going places

He has composed for leading orchestras in LA, Berlin, Chicago and Zurich, but Anders Hillborg's piece for Renée Fleming brought him home to Stockholm for a live recording that has now been released on Decca, writes Andrew Mellor

tockholm. In no other Nordic capital does the principal concert hall sit at the heart of the metropolis quite like it does here. The Stockholm Concert Hall overlooks a busy market square in the middle of the city's shopping district; it has a metro station deep within its bowels and a branch of Sweden's ubiquitous coffee chain Wayne's embedded in its box office.

But unlike its Nordic counterparts, Stockholm's hall isn't a gleaming contemporary structure. It's an imposing neo-classical monolith with few visible windows and all the external atmosphere of a civic courthouse. 'This building has been here for 90 years. It's something of a landmark', says Sakari Oramo, chief conductor of the resident Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra, who's seated in a long boardroom lined with paintings of illustrious Swedish musicians. 'This isn't the Musiikkitalo in Helsinki or even the Royal Festival Hall in London. It's more like the Musikverein in Vienna. You have to have a certain amount of respect to go in!'

Despite that physical embodiment of tradition, twice a year the Stockholm Concert Hall is plastered with posters that speak absolutely of the here and now. Each autumn the RSPO presents the Stockholm International Composer Festival, showcasing the most interesting new orchestral music from around the world. 'Tippett was here just before he died, Lutosławski and Krzysztof Penderecki have featured, and more recently we've had Unsuk Chin and Brett Dean', says Oramo. Following that, an annual Composer Weekend in the spring profiles an up-and-coming Swede.

If contemporary music is more a part of the RSPO's DNA than ever before, it tells us that the old model of radio orchestra propagating new music and civic orchestra sticking to traditional repertoire is eroding fast. That shift is noticeable in Oramo's native Helsinki just as it is in Stockholm, where Daniel Harding's Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra is forging ahead with traditional central European repertoire as much as Oramo's ensemble is playing new music. 'The Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra actually plays less new music than it did before, and we do more. But that had been building up long before I arrived – these festivals have been running for 30 years', says Oramo. 'They attract a huge audience.'

Whatever the RSPO is doing to get people to listen to unfamiliar music, it seems to be working. 'You get buy-in and momentum from doing it in a festival context', says Lotta Bjelkeborn, marketing director for both the orchestra and the concert hall. 'But it's not only a commercial consideration. It's about achieving a high level of performance that you get from concentrating on a certain composer and it's also about creating some depth – something that can be drilled down into by us and by the audience. It's a huge advantage that the orchestra owns the hall. We can block off whole periods of time and do what we like.'

Step forward Anders Hillborg (b1954), probably the most internationally performed Swedish composer right now, living or otherwise. In recent years he has fulfilled commissions for the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the Berlin Philharmonic and the Chicago Symphony and Zurich Tonhalle orchestras. Back in 1999 he was the subject of the RSPO Composer Weekend. The orchestra still cleaves to him, and vice versa, while a series of recordings on BIS have ensured that his music can be heard by anyone, anywhere. 'I don't think Stockholm is currently a place where you become a famous composer', says Oramo. 'You can have your first steps here, but then you must go out and find people who want to perform your music elsewhere. Then you can come back as a winner.'

That is precisely what Hillborg has done. In February 2016, the RSPO presented his song-cycle *The Strand Settings* (2012-13), alongside music by Barber and Ravel, with its dedicatee Renée Fleming as soloist – a sure sign that new music isn't confined to those twice-yearly festivals (of Oramo's five subscription concerts in the 2015-16 season, four featured a premiere of some description). 'We get a good response when we combine a well-known artist with lesser-known or contemporary repertoire', says Bjelkeborn. I believe her: there was hardly an empty seat in the cavernous hall at the performance of *The Strand Settings*, which was recorded live for Decca. Even Sweden's king came along to hear the piece.

What King Carl XVI Gustaf and the rest of us heard was music of the utmost delicacy entirely rooted in its text. 'You can't really ignore the audience – unless you don't want an audience', says Fleming, explaining her decision to commission

American accent to The Strand Settings (Hillborg takes that as a compliment: 'I wrote it with an American artist in mind, so that makes me happy'). Fleming comes to the party



Meeting of musical minds: Sakari Oramo, Renée Fleming and Anders Hillborg peruse the score of Hillborg's The Strand Settings

It's like a sung dialogue happening over

went for an intimate sound' - Renée Fleming

a musical landscape. For the recording we

Hillborg. 'In new music I want something fresh but not reactionary, and to some degree accessible. I feel Anders has that middle ground and I absolutely love his atmospheric language. I always describe it as a musical landscape.' Oramo speaks of the music's 'immediate soulfulness'.

True enough. In The Strand Settings you hear the sea described by the poet Mark Strand (Fleming pointed Hillborg in the direction of the Canadian poet; the composer then selected specific texts from his pen). You also hear the darkness

and light to which Strand alludes in his text. At the concert, you could decipher almost every word Fleming sang. Hillborg describes the texts he chose as 'aerated... there was room for another

medium in them'. But perhaps their musical potential lies in their combination of surface clarity – often humorous, absurd or very straight in a narrative sense - and a secondary resonance, an undertone of something deep and sometimes disturbing. Fleming worked extensively with the composer on technical matters during the composition process, but speaks of the resulting score as extreme but singable. 'It's almost like a sung dialogue happening over this musical landscape', she says. 'For the recording we went for the sort of intimate sound that you can create in a live performance.'

Apart from her world premiere performance in New York in 2013, Fleming (who commissioned the piece with funds from the New York Philharmonic and Carnegie Hall) has already performed The Strand Settings in London and Minneapolis as well as in Stockholm; the piece has also been performed in the Swedish capital by a different soprano. 'What I've discovered is that with any new piece, including Le temps l'horloge, which was written for me by Dutilleux, the person it was written for needs to advocate it by performing it', says Fleming. 'I take that seriously; these works cannot be forgotten.'

Her recording of *The Strand Settings* will make sure of that. Joining it on the Decca CD are songs by Icelandic musician Björk and Barber's Knoxville: Summer of 1915. The last also featured at the Stockholm concert, forming a neat counterbalance if, like me, anyone senses a slight North

At heart, though, Hillborg is an orchestral composer. 'He has acquired a sort of signature way of writing for orchestra which really works', says Oramo; 'I think whenever this orchestra gets a new piece by Anders in front of it it kind of relates to it immediately'. The composer says he would be 'nowhere' without the RSPO: 'Is there another orchestra in the world that does these kinds of festivals?' he asks. There may be. But there aren't many others that would commit to so many recordings of a single composer's works with so many illustrious

soloists (Fleming, Martin Fröst) and conductors (Oramo, Esa-Pekka Salonen, David Zinman and Alan Gilbert). 'Most orchestras are terrible at mirroring their own time', Hillborg says

despairingly. 'It's just the old dead guys again and again. Hopeless. Absolutely hopeless. So I only have praise for the way it works here.'

He describes the opportunity to have his work performed as 'crucial' and has fascinating thoughts on orchestral personality in an increasingly globalised world. 'Every orchestra has a soul', he says. 'I can't put it into words but the difference is beautiful. The Berlin Philharmonic is good at some things, another orchestra that's not so famous is better at others. As for the RSPO - I've been coming to hear it since I was a kid and I've watched it get better and better with Gilbert and now Oramo. It's still going up and up.'

Perhaps Sweden and the RSPO have something to prove, too, sandwiched as they are between the new-music powerhouses of Denmark and Finland. 'We want to give an example to the younger generation that it is possible in Sweden as well as in Finland and in Denmark to write music that is both original and of a high quality and that people will want to perform and listen to', says Oramo. 'We really believe in the quality of Hillborg's music. But at the same time we have to create an atmosphere in which people think that that sort of quality is possible and that it'll get exposure.' Those who know and like Hillborg's music will want to hear The Strand Settings. But with Fleming's advocacy, Hillborg's exposure is set to get a whole lot wider. **G** 

▶ To read Gramophone's review of Fleming's new Hillborg CD, turn to page 80



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# GRAMOPHONE RECORDINGOFTHEMONTH

Peter Quantrill admires Pablo Heras-Casado's classy account of Tchaikovsky's First Symphony, which so vividly places the work in its post-Mendelssohn, pre-Brahms context



#### **Tchaikovsky**

Symphony No 1, 'Winter Daydreams', Op 13. The Tempest, Op 18 Orchestra of St Luke's / Pablo Heras-Casado Harmonia Mundi ® HMC90 2220 (68' • DDD)

Victoria, Monteverdi, Carter, Boulez and a great deal in between: Pablo Heras-Casado is one of those conductors, not common in any generation, who dine further afield than the meat-and-potatoes repertoire offered by most of his colleagues. The work he does has its place and time. A sense of place in the Winter Daydreams Symphony – a rattling sleigh, a misty steppe and so on is well provided for on record, and if you're familiar with a piece generally underrated on account of certain weaknesses in the finale, your tastes may embrace, moving from East to West, Golovanov, Smetáček, Karajan, Rostropovich, Jurowski (both with the LPO) and Tilson Thomas.

In their different ways, all these conductors convey the sense of a distinctively Russian composer taking his first steps, some confident, some faltering, in a genre hitherto foreign to his tradition. The context of its time, however, the 1866-ness of the piece, is more elusive, and here Heras-Casado brings a special alertness to the pointing of phrase and building of form that makes sense of

what the composer's brother Modest tells us about the works's difficult birth, a decade before Brahms finally produced his own First Symphony. For astutely chosen exemplars, Tchaikovsky would play through the *Italian* Symphony of Mendelssohn and the *Spring* Symphony of Schumann.

This is hardly the first recording to bring Mendelssohnian deftness to the Scherzo and the waltz-Trio (and to imagine the influence



'The smaller scale tells not in lack of impact but the reverse. When trombones and bass drum make telling entrances in the outer movements, you know about it'

working spookily in reverse, listen to the second movement of Mendelssohn's *Lobgesang* in Heras-Casado's recording with the Freiburg Baroque Orchestra), but the thinning out of the Scherzo to a few solo voices – like guests drifting away from the Act 3 ball of *Eugene Onegin* – is so characteristic of both composers. It is

achieved here with an intimacy that comes naturally to chamber orchestras, rather than as one of those sudden hushes implied by the kind of 'now, children, let's be quiet as mice' gestures sometimes seen on the podium, perhaps more for the audience than the orchestra's benefit. (At this point and others, the most recent rival recording, of the RLPO and Vasily Petrenko – Onyx, 8/16 – is neatly done but generic.) And Schumann? Try the barely contained but uninflated exuberance of the first movement's main statements in the brass.

The nearest interpretative point of comparison, then, is with Jurowski (LPO, 11/09), who moves with no less flair between period and big symphonic orchestras. Nonetheless, the Orchestra of St Luke's is a Classically sized and inclined ensemble. The difference in scale tells not in lack of impact but the reverse. When trombones and bass drum make telling entrances in the outer movements, you know about it. The finale's string fugato is that crucial degree more sinewy - and convincing - when taken on the wing by musicians for whom Mozart rather than Mahler is daily bread. Unlike Sir Roger Norrington's *Pathétique*, this historically sensitive approach does not entail a stripped-pine tone quality.

With a flexible but coherent momentum, Heras-Casado takes his time to draw out the shy second theme of the symphony's *Adagio cantabile*, which steals in with sensuous reticence. His boldest step is to lend Brucknerian nobility to the theme's return on full horns at the movement's climax: it's much less crude than any other version I've heard and brings a new pathos to the coda.



Classically sized and inclined: the Orchestra of St Luke's

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Pablo Heras-Casado brings a special alertness to the pointing of phrase and building of form

There is throughout the symphony a continence of rhetoric that may appeal to anyone not unshakably attached to Golovanov, Svetlanov and their kin. Even the finale's efficient rather than inspired episodes of contrapuntal imitation are elevated to bring the symphony to a well-earned point of arrival worthy of comparison with Jurowski and Karajan. The voltage may be lower in The Tempest, but then Heras-Casado's approach is not to mask the structural cracks in the piece with greasepaint. He attends carefully to each picturesque episode and naturalistic detail, bringing Liszt's Les préludes to mind more than Tchaikovsky's Romeo and Juliet. In fact the storm itself lacks nothing in vehemence, and as in the symphony's first movement, the synchronicity of motion

and expressive intent within the string body projects the music more strongly than a larger, more diffuse ensemble (just as a choir of 16 often sounds louder than one of 60). The strange, unison string recitative before the coda (much borrowed by Shostakovich, almost directly so in the Fifth Symphony) is not simply hurled out but introduces a note of properly Shakespearean ambiguity before Prospero's chorale and the Impressionist seascape take over.

On the heels of Bychkov's fascinating *Pathétique* and Barenboim's latest, positively cinematic take on the orchestral texture of the Violin Concerto, Heras-Casado has me wondering about a new wave of Tchaikovsky performance: shunning hysteria and crocodile tears, painting pictures, telling stories. **6** 

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#### **Editor's Choice**

Martin Cullingford's pick of the finest recordings reviewed in this issue

# Orchestral



# Stephen Plaistow listens to Rudolf Buchbinder playing Brahms:

'The Second Concerto isn't a piece of chamber music writ large but an ease with the play of its dialogues is key to it' > REVIEW ON PAGE 29



#### Hannah Nepil on Smetana's Má vlast from Jakub Hrůša:

'In the last two movements especially, we find raw energy, theatricality and, perhaps most strikingly, pathos' ▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 40

#### Aho · Fagerlund

Aho Bassoon Concerto<sup>a</sup>. Solo V Fagerlund
Bassoon Concerto, 'Mana'<sup>b</sup>. Woodlands
Bram van Sambeek bn a<sup>b</sup>Lahti Symphony
Orchestra / bOkko Kamu, bDima Slobodeniouk
BIS (F) BIS2206 (76' • DDD/DSD)



Sebastian Fagerlund's violin concerto *Darkness in Light* mightily impressed

me on disc (5/15) and his no less involving bassoon concerto Mana (2013-14) reveals once again his fertile and compelling musical intellect. In a single, unbroken span lasting 19 minutes, Mana is an imaginative fantasia, its three sections alternately lively and contemplative. While sounding taxing to play (though I'm no bassoonist), its dedicatee Bram van Sambeek relishes its demands and is given wonderful support by the Lahti Symphony Orchestra and Okko Kamu. Van Sambeek also throws off the atmospheric solo Woodlands (2012), part tone poem, part instrumental study composed in preparation ahead of the concerto.

Fagerlund's elder compatriot Kalevi Aho has composed an impressive array of concertos standing alongside his epic series of symphonies (16 to date). For those who know his weighty Contrabassoon Concerto (7/07), Aho's Bassoon Concerto (2004) is a lithe yet compelling *sinfonia concertante* in four movements (five if the cadenza which follows the third, an atmospheric Passacaglia with a whiff of Rautavaara about it – is counted separately), slowfast-slow-fast, possessing considerable cumulative power and no little symphonic gravity. A more rounded work than Mana, it is beautifully played by van Sambeek in a nuanced and balanced account strongly supported by the Lahti Symphony Orchestra, with whom he audibly enjoys great rapport, under one of the best concerto conductors around, Dima Slobodeniouk. There is also a breathtakingly virtuoso account of Solo V (1999), the

bassoon instalment in Aho's marvellous ongoing instrumental series. Stunningly vivid sound throughout, as we expect from BIS. **Guy Rickards** 

#### **JB Bach**

Four Ouvertures
L'Achéron / François Joubert-Caillet bass viol
Ricercar ® RIC373 (77' • DDD)



How many careless shoppers, I wonder, will buy this disc thinking it contains

the four Ouvertures (or Orchestral Suites) of JS Bach? Given that I know someone who once bought a disc of The Four Seasons only to discover when he got it home that it was played on panpipes, I'm sure these things can happen. But then that's not always a bad thing, and certainly these pieces by Johann Bernhard Bach (1676-1749), a slightly older second cousin of Sebastian's, are worth a hearing, unexpected or otherwise. While there is no evidence that the two ever met, it seems inconceivable that they did not, and we know that Sebastian performed three of Bernhard's four surviving suites at his Collegium Musicum concerts in Leipzig in the 1730s

Although similar in form to Sebastian's suites, it is the melody-led examples of Telemann and Graupner that Bernhard's call more readily to mind. Composed in the 1710s, they probably predate his cousin's anyway, and are a little more old-fashioned in their closer relationship to the French style that spawned the genre, mixing courtly dance types such as the sarabande and the menuet with galanteries such as the rigaudon and passepied and even character pieces such as 'Les Plaisirs' and 'La Joye'. The D major Suite has three Caprices which, judging by their dissimilarity, seems to be what Bernhard called anything he couldn't think of another name for.

Expanding from their usual guise as a viol consort, L'Achéron perform stylishly

and gracefully, adding well-chosen and effective wind doublings to Bach's basic string texture. The low pitch they use robs the sound of a little brightness, but they can still draw poignancy from each suite's tender Air and find energy in the looser rustic numbers. If not in the JSB league when all is said and done, these suites are still a pleasant encounter. Lindsay Kemp

## Bartók · Krenek · Schoenberg

'Elegy

**Bartók** Piano Concerto No 3, Sz119<sup>a</sup> **Krenek** Symphonic Elegy, Op 105 **Schoenberg** Accompaniment to a Cinematographic Scene, Op 34. Piano Concerto, Op 42<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Pina Napolitano pf

Liepāja Symphony Orchestra / Atvars Lakstīgala Odradek E ODRCD339 (74' • DDD)



For Schoenberg's Piano Concerto to sound effective the listener must be able to

feel utterly at home in the work, at ease with its language, so to speak; for much of the time Pina Napolitano allows us to do this with what seems like little effort. Odradek's excellent annotator Hugh Collins Rice remarks on the concerto's combination of modernism and nostalgia, and aside from the frequent fluency of Napolitano's playing, the excellent contribution from Latvia's Liepāja Symphony Orchestra under Atvars Lakstīgala and the superb sound – the col legno strings and big drums come off especially well – make a telling impression. On the evidence of what we hear, pianist and orchestra are at one in the way they view the score: note, for example the delicacy of Napolitano's playing at the start of the finale and the way the Liepāja woodwinds respond to her.

Delicacy, or something akin to it, is a quality I would have welcomed rather more of in the first movement of Bartók's Third Concerto, which sounds darker than usual, as if the music had fallen prey to the

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A combination of modernism and nostalgia: Schoenberg from pianist Pina Napolitano (right) and conductor Atvars Lakstīgala

predominantly sombre mood of the preceding orchestral pieces. Schoenberg's largely pensive Accompaniment to a Cinematographic Scene, with its allusions of 'danger, fear and catastrophe', here starts ppp while the later episodes – again superbly recorded (try the bass drum at 4'14") - raise the alarm. Krenek's Symphonic *Elegy* for string orchestra (in memory of Webern) features some extremely expressive string-playing, though it turns more argumentative at around the midway point. So Bartók follows on the heels of some pretty angst-ridden music. Again the bass drum makes an impressive showing (at 0'52" into the finale) but it's the Adagio religioso slow movement that comes off best, especially the tortured climax at 9'14" (note the prominent tam-tam at 9'43"), with sweetly singing strings returning to intensify the mood.

Strictly speaking, given the unusual programming, comparisons are irrelevant, though harking back to the great Zoltán Kocsis under Iván Fischer returns us to the sort of crisp, darting inflections that Bartók's Third Concerto cries out for, while viewed overall Mitsuko Uchida and Pierre Boulez provide the more urgent and compellingly rigorous account of the Schoenberg Concerto. Still, Pina

Napolitano and the Liepāja Symphony Orchestra do well and, as I've already suggested, Odradek's sound is superb.

#### Rob Cowan

Bartók – selected comparison: Kocsis, Budapest Fest Orch, I Fischer (1/88<sup>R</sup>, 12/95<sup>R</sup>) (DECC) 478 9311 Schoenberg Piano Concerto – selected comparison: Uchida, Cleveland Orch, Boulez (6/01) (PHIL) 468 033-2PH

#### **Brahms**

Piano Concertos - No 1, Op 15; No 2, Op 83 **Rudolf Buchbinder** *pf* 

Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra / Zubin Mehta Sony Classical (M) (2) 88985 37158-2 (91' • DDD) Recorded live at the Musikverein, Vienna, March 7-10, 2015



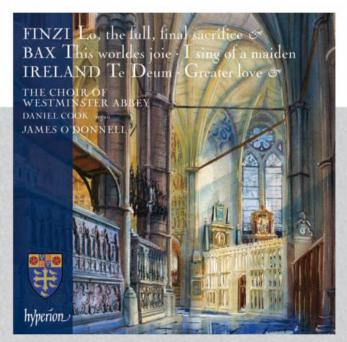
This is a recording made at concerts Rudolf Buchbinder gave with Zubin

Mehta and the VPO in the Goldener Saal of the Vienna Musikverein in March 2015. He's a fine player and you have to admire the stamina of someone at nearly 70 who can give the two Brahms concertos in a single evening. Perhaps one should admire

the audience's stamina too. He began with No 2 in B flat and says that he always plays No 1 in D minor after the interval since 'there is really nothing else that can follow it – it is simply too inspired'.

The booklet, rather a muddle in English, is much more about Buchbinder than Brahms, as if inviting acclaim for the vision and insights he brings to these monumental pieces rather than the character and variety the composer took such pains to enshrine in them. Buchbinder has recorded them twice before – with Harnoncourt and the Concertgebouw, and more recently with Mehta again and the Israel PO – and I must be fair to him: whatever you think of his sensibility and limitations, there are few players who can command these pieces technically as completely as he does.

They are driven pretty hard, particularly in their first movements, with the sound full and the attack powerful as if we needed constantly to be reminded of Brahms's massiveness. But I do like the strictness of tempo. Where others might see cues for easings, or at least a glance to left and right, soloist and conductor keep going, straight down the middle, which is probably close to what the composer intended. Doubts occur when there seems not enough variety of weight and expression. The middle of





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the first movement of No 2, after the big climax piano and orchestra build in F minor, is so rich in incident and colour that a traversal of it as if there were nothing that required differentiation is bound to seem inadequate. Pianists accepting the old nonsense about these concertos being really 'symphonies with piano' are frequently guilty of such misconceptions. Let me suggest listening to one who isn't: Nicholas Angelich, with the Frankfurt Radio Orchestra and Paavo Järvi, who characterises the shifting subtleties between the solo part and the orchestra with an eloquence born of long experience with Brahms's chamber music. I revisit his version of No 2 always with delight. The Concerto isn't a piece of chamber music writ large but an ease with the play of its dialogues is key to it.

Buchbinder can nevertheless do very good things. In the second movement (the scherzo) he reduces his intensity in the second theme (tranquillo e dolce - 0'37") and plays this section with all the light and shade and fluency of rhythmic inflection that you too rarely hear from others. He slackens the tempo slightly but re-establishes it as soon as we reach the 'first time' bar and go back to the appassionato beginning. I sat up again in the third movement at the passage of rapt stillness where the piano is in distant conversation with the pair of clarinets: Buchbinder's response to the magic makes you hold your breath.

By the end of the First Concerto, played after No 2 at the concerts, you can tell that Buchbinder is tiring and glad to reach the finishing line. The VPO, sumptuously recorded, are with him throughout but the performance of the finale isn't distinguished. The second movement, the threnody for Schumann, disappointed me also. In the best versions - from Solomon with Kubelík and the Philharmonia in 1952, through Curzon with Szell and the LSO, to Brendel with Abbado, Pollini also with Abbado and Bishop-Kovacevich with Sawallisch – you wait for the piano's first solo in this Adagio in the expectation that it will draw you into a new dimension of interiority and feeling, after the orchestra has set the scene. Buchbinder is perfunctory and doesn't manage it. There's more to admire in the opening *Maestoso* where he shows it can have a convincing aspect without being slow. Don't look to him, however, for a varied Romantic discourse with windows opened from time to time on to Wunderhorn nature - the articulation of heroic drama is more his thing.

Stephen Plaistow

#### Britten · Elgar · Vaughan Williams

Britten Variations on a Theme of Frank Bridge, Op 10 Elgar Introduction and Allegro, Op 47 Vaughan Williams Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis

LSO String Ensemble / Roman Simovic vn LSO Live M \_ LSO0792 (54' • DDD) Recorded live at the Barbican, London, February 3, 2016



Sakari Oramo's recent Ostrobothnian CO version of Britten's Frank Bridge

Variations (Alba, 9/16) served up plenty of food for thought. By its side, this LSO Live newcomer, for all its cleanheeled athleticism and rhythmic spring, never quite settles, evincing rather less in the way of recreative spark, crisp discipline and unanimity of purpose. Need I add that both are, in turn, outflanked by the composer's blisteringly eloquent 1966 recording with the ECO (Decca, 1/87)?

I'm not entirely sold on this new Tallis Fantasia either. LSO leader Roman Simovic elicits a generally tidy response from his colleagues but the actual interpretation brings with it a hint of blandness. Indeed, the score is surveyed with such tasteful objectivity that it's often difficult to detect the passion simmering beneath the surface, while that astounding climactic largamente paragraph beginning at three before fig R (or 9'39") lacks clinching intensity. I also find myself craving a greater sense of atmosphere and depth of perspective than the Barbican Hall acoustic can muster. Something of a lightweight, then, and certainly no match for Mark Elder's resplendent Hallé recording (2/15) or Andrew Davis's wonderfully rapt (and superlatively engineered) BBC SO version (Warner Apex, 5/03).

The Elgar Introduction and Allegro goes best, but even here it's not hard to imagine playing of greater intensity, flair and edge-of-seat excitement - speaking of which, don't deprive yourself of experiencing Barbirolli in this glorious music, above all his incandescent 1956 account with the Hallé. Andrew Achenbach

#### Bruckner

Symphony No 4, 'Romantic'

(1878-80 version, ed Haas) Staatskapelle Dresden / Christian Thielemann Video director Agnes Méth

C Major Entertainment 🕒 🕿 732508; F ≥ 732604 (75' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DTS-HD MA5.0, DTS5.0 & PCM stereo • 0) Recorded live at the Festspielhaus, Baden-Baden, May 23, 2015



This is the second version of Bruckner's Fourth Symphony on DVD and Blu-ray disc conducted by Christian Thielemann

to appear in less than a decade, the previous version also recorded live in the Festspielhaus Baden-Baden and also directed by Agnes Méth. There are, however, some key differences between the two versions, and not entirely in the newcomer's favour.

The principal advantage of the new version is the playing of the Staatskapelle Dresden, which is even finer than that of the Munich Philharmonic on the 2008 recording. This is particularly apparent in the Andante, a movement that can drag in lesser performances but which is here hauntingly atmospheric. Thielemann keeps a firm grip on dynamic levels ppp really means ppp – and the hushed playing is exquisitely rendered. The depth of sonority of horns, trombones and pizzicato double basses at 32'26" (just before fig M) is just one of many outstanding moments, and the Scherzo's brief Trio, delicately shaded and imbued with pastoral warmth, is similarly memorable.

On the debit side, I find the performance somewhat wanting in intensity in the outer movements, Thielemann's authoritative navigation of the symphonic structure notwithstanding. In this respect the earlier recording is much to be preferred. The Munich Philharmonic's delivery of the symphony's quieter passages might not match the refinement of their Dresden colleagues but the performance as a whole is more vibrant and involving. The earlier version also enjoys slightly better sound, avoiding the tendency towards congestion in louder passages that occasionally affects the newer recording. Both versions feature Agnes Méth's rather restive directorial style, which I find better suited to the faster movements than to the more static Andante. A final differentiating factor for those not collecting Thielemann's Dresden Bruckner cycle is that the Munich version includes a performance of the Seventh Symphony while the new release has no coupling.

#### **Christian Hoskins**

Selected comparison: Munich PO, Thielemann (8/10) (CMA7) **22** 701908; **2** 712304

# Dvořák · R Strauss · Elizondo · Massenet

**Dvořák** Carnival, Op 92 B169<sup>a</sup>. Symphony No 8, Op 88 B163<sup>a</sup> **Elizondo** Danzas latinoamericanas, 'Otoño en Buenos Aires'<sup>b</sup> **Massenet** Don Quichotte - Interlude No 2, 'La Tristesse de Dulcinée' **R Strauss** Don Quixote, Op 35<sup>c</sup> <sup>c</sup>**Wen Xiao Zheng** *Va* <sup>bc</sup>**Yo-Yo Ma**, <sup>b</sup>**Maximilian Hornung** *Vc* <sup>ac</sup>**Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra / Mariss Jansons** 

Video director Michael Beyer
Belvedere © № BVD08023; © № BVD08024
(111' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080p • DTS-HD MA5.1,
DTS5.0 & PCM stereo • 0)
Recorded live at the Philharmonie im Gasteig,
Munich, January 2016



The headline act in this January 2016 Munich concert was the cellist Yo-Yo Ma as the eponymous hero of Richard

Strauss's *Don Quixote*. The real wonder, however, is the Dvořák. In an ideal world, these two Dvořák pieces would have been released on a single CD, though I'm bound to concede that there's a certain pleasure to be had from watching this fabulous orchestra in action. (Is there currently a finer conductor-orchestra combination than this, in Germany or beyond?)

The Carnival overture, the rowdier younger brother of the Eighth Symphony's own folk-festival finale, is a difficult piece to bring off if it's a musical revel you seek as opposed to mere noise. Happily, there is nothing remotely noisy about this exceptionally classy performance. The Eighth Symphony is one of the loveliest and in episode after episode one of the most purely affecting – in the repertory. This is a deeply treasurable account of it. It is also one that yields nothing in charm or authenticity of mood to performances under such Czech-born masters as Talich, Stupka and Kubelík. (I see that Stupka's live 1959 recording with the Czech Philharmonic, a performance long known to Dvořák collectors, has recently been reissued by Praga.)

The *Quixote*, sadly, is a disappointment. Orchestrally it is highly explicit: at times, perhaps, too much so. But it is Ma who is the real problem, with his visually impassioned but often tonally exiguous and dramatically indeterminate playing. The 'Vigil' is movingly realised but elsewhere his performance falls some way short of such classic recorded accounts as Fournier's (with Krauss, Karajan or Szell), Tortelier's (with Beecham or Kempe) or Janigro's (with Reiner). The Sancho Panza is the

orchestra's young Chinese-born principal viola Wen Xiao Zheng. He is very fine, as is the cellist Maximilian Hornung (a Quixote in waiting?), who joins Ma in one of his two nicely contrasted encores.

But it's the Dvořák that's the real draw here. The symphony's rapturous reception – the genuine rapture of an audience bowled over and ablaze with joy – says it all. **Richard Osborne** 

#### Dvořák

Symphony No 9, 'From the New World', Op 95 B178. The Noon Witch, Op 108 B196 Nuremberg State Philharmonic Orchestra / Marcus Bosch

Coviello 🖲 🥌 COV91618 (56' • DDD/DSD)

Recorded live at the Meistersingerhalle, Nürnberg,
May 11-14, 2016



With this live recording of the Ninth, Marcus Bosch is close to

concluding his Dvořák cycle for Coviello. As in previous recordings with the Nuremberg State Philharmonic, Bosch's Dvořák is brusque, especially in the bucolic moments. He pulls back for teasing rubatos in the first movement (which includes the exposition repeat), but presses on fiercely during its closing pages. The *Molto vivace* has a strong folksy feel and the finale is bracing.

Whether the *Largo* explores Native American melodies or is merely Dvořák pining for his Bohemian homeland, it deserves a less matter-of-fact performance than it receives here - the famous cor anglais solo sounds under-nourished and muted horns lack mystery, although the clarinets glow with a mulled spice warmth. Bosch keeps it on the move – just as Kirill Kondrashin does in his superb Vienna recording – although the fermatas towards the end (9'15") are exaggerated. Coviello's sound is resonant, but timpani are muffled and the horns don't enjoy much prominence. Nothing to challenge Kondrashin and Kubelík here as my 'go to' Ninths.

Far too quickly after the symphony's final, fading note, *The Noon Witch* steals in. This symphonic poem tells the tale of a witch summoned to deal with a naughty boy. The terror her appearance induces causes the child's mother to accidentally smother her son, the father's lament closing the work. The Nuremburg woodwinds emit convincing cackles and Bosch shapes the climax with plenty of muscle, but Dvořák's work is a bit of a

watercolour portrait. At 56 minutes, the disc is short measure. Mark Pullinger Symphony No 9 – selected comparisons:

VPO, Kondrashin (7/80<sup>R</sup>) (DECC) → 448 245-2DEC BPO, Kubelik (10/73<sup>R</sup>) (DG) 447 4122GOR,

477 9764GM2, 478 3378GB or • 479 4384GOR

#### Elgar · Martinů

'Sol Gabetta Live'

Elgar Cello Concerto, Op 85a

Martinů Cello Concerto No 1, H196b

Sol Gabetta VC Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra /
aSir Simon Rattle, bKrzysztof Urbański

Sony Classical © 88985 35079-2 (56' • DDD)

Recorded live at the aFestspielhaus,

Baden-Baden, April 20, 2014; bPhilharmonie,

Berlin, May 23 & 24, 2014

# Elgar · Ligeti · Stravinsky · Wagner

Elgar Cello Concerto, Op 85<sup>a</sup> Ligeti Atmosphères Stravinsky The Rite of Spring Wagner Lohengrin - Prelude, Act 1 <sup>a</sup>Sol Gabetta VC

Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra / Sir Simon Rattle Video director Torben Schmidt Jacobsen EuroArts (€) 205 9968; (€) 205 9964 (90' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DTS-HD MA5.1, DTS5.1 & PCM stereo • 0)

Recorded live at the Festspielhaus, Baden-Baden, April 20, 2014





Sol Gabetta's handling of Martinu's lifeaffirming First Cello Concerto (1930-55), which over a 25-year period grew from a chamber concerto into a fully fledged orchestral piece, embraces the gamut of colours and technical jinks called for with what sounds like genuine relish. This is superb cello-playing and Krzysztof Urbański directs a vital and sensitive accompaniment. As to the Elgar Concerto, when I reviewed Gabetta's first recording of the work back in October 2010, I praised it as 'one of the best around, a heartfelt, tonally rounded performance, intimate and wholly at one with Mario Venzago's generally subtle handling of the orchestral score'. Venzago was conducting the Danish National Symphony Orchestra, an excellent band, but Simon Rattle's alert and tonally rich Berlin Philharmonic is in a higher league altogether, and therein lies one of the principal differences between this version from 2014 and its generally more restrained predecessor.

Rattle's presence can be heard, and felt, in virtually every bar of the score: the way

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Guretzky's concertos bring good things out of The Harmonious Society of Tickle-Fiddle Gentlemen, who fully live up to their name

he moulds phrases, nudges details to the fore, bends the line, holds tight to a salient accompanying detail (especially along the lower end of the spectrum) or responds to Gabetta's characterful solo playing, now rather more stylised than it was before. She'll toy with slides, vary her vibrato or suspend it altogether, indulge a widened range of dynamics and, at the start of the finale proper, gallop away with tremendous energy, more so than with Venzago.

Printed alongside that original 2010 review was an interview in which Gabetta confessed how important it is to find a different interpretation to Jacqueline du Pré's. 'The most terrifying thing to do as a young artist is to try and copy it because you can't - and of course I wouldn't want to', as she put it then. Revisiting that older version now, I hear the 'purity and clarity' she was aiming at, but paradoxically the passing of time seems to have allowed her licence to be freer, more outgoing, more emotive and more expressively generous in her approach. Of course Rattle, the Berlin Phil and the live performing environment are likely contributing factors to this subtle rethink but I suspect that Gabetta's renewed responses to Elgar are more significant still.

The DVD performance (also set down at the Festpielhaus, Baden-Baden, in 2014), if not absolutely identical, is more or less so. We note Gabetta's tensed arm, back and shoulder musculature, her facial mobility, bodily too, in the first movement's swaying second subject. In the scherzo it's good to see her visibly relating to the other players, her habitually serious expression breaking into a smile, whereas you sense from her expressions that for her the Adagio is more a sighing song of thanksgiving than a mournful threnody.

Prior to the Elgar, Rattle conducts Ligeti's Atmosphères, which is fascinating to watch on account of its massive scoring, including clothes brushes drawn across the piano strings, and there's the magical segueing into the first-act Prelude to Wagner's Lohengrin. It's obvious that Rattle is having a whale of a time in The Rite of Spring and the orchestra respond to him with loving attention: note the long crescendo and gradual application of vibrato at the start of the opening bassoon solo and the groaning tonal fallout at the start of 'The Sacrifice'. Taut rhythms and a sense of balletic engagement are also much in evidence.

As to which way you should acquire Gabetta's fairly unmissable new account of the Elgar, if you're especially keen on the idea of Rattle's programme (a very good one) then go for the DVD; otherwise I'd stick with the CD, mainly because, musically speaking, Martinů's Concerto is such a worthwhile and unusual coupling. The Elgar certainly compares favourably with, among digital options, Natalie Clein, Alisa Weilerstein and Steven Isserlis. Rob Cowan

Elgar - selected comparisons:

Clein, RLPO, Handley (A/07) (EMI/WARN) 501409-2 Weilerstein, Staatskapelle Berlin, Barenboim

(2/13) (DECC) 478 2735DH

Isserlis, Philh Orch, P Järvi (3/16) (HYPE) CDA68077

#### Guretzky · Černohorský

Černohorský Fugue in A minor Guretzky Violin Concerto in D. Cello Concertos -D-WD573; D-WD574; D-WD575; D-WD577

The Harmonious Society

of Tickle-Fiddle Gentlemen

Chandos Chaconne (F) CHANO816 (73' • DDD)



The Harmonious Society of Tickle-Fiddle Gentlemen is no joking matter.

Named after the musicians that gave London's first public concerts in the late

# GRAMOPHONE

# Editor's Choice

Every issue, Gramophone's Editor's Choices highlight the most exciting and important new releases. Explore here a selection of the most thrilling music-making of the past six months



# BACEWICZ Complete String Quartets Silesian Quartet Chandos This may be new

– it was to me
– but these seven quartets offer a superb
entrance into a sound world that journeys
from the neo-classical to a modernist
voice of great originality.

#### ► REVIEWED IN AUGUST 2016



#### MacMILLAN

music to you

Since it was the
Day of Preparation...

Hebrides Ensemble
Delphian
The second
fascinating
modern Gospel

setting in this month's selection – this time of the final sections from St John: a powerful work of personal faith by James MacMillan.

#### ► REVIEWED IN AUGUST 2016



#### RACHMANINOV

Vespers
St Thomas Choir of
Men and Boys /
John Scott
Resonus
Rachmaninov's
Vespers, here

recorded with an all-male choir with boy trebles, in a magnificent performance under the sure hand of the late John Scott.

► REVIEWED IN SEPTEMBER 2016



#### 'BACH ALL'ITALIANO'

Simon Borutzki rec et al Klanglogo Young recorder player Simon Borutzki is

highly impressive in this performance of, among other pieces, Bach's transcriptions for harpsichord of violin concertos, now arranged for recorder – just listen!

#### ► REVIEWED IN AUGUST 2016



# BRUCKNER Mass No 3, etc Philharmonie Festiva / Gerd Schaller Profil Gerd Schaller

follows his

cycle of Bruckner symphonies with an excellent performance of the composer's Mass No 3, superb soloists and recording quality adding to the appeal.

#### ► REVIEWED IN SEPTEMBER 2016



# SCHOENBERG String Quartets Asasello Quartet Genuin Following on from the Diotima Quartet's set of these works

earlier in the year, the Asasello Quartet's Schoenberg survey is equally penetrating, perceptive and fascinating – and worth acquiring.

► REVIEWED IN SEPTEMBER 2016



#### EŠENVALDS

Passion According to St Luke Latvian Radio Choir / Sigvards Kļava Ondine Beginning in a moment of high

drama – the crowd's shouting 'Crucify him' – Ešenvalds's 2014 Passion setting offers listeners varied musical styles and superb performances.

#### ► REVIEWED IN AUGUST 2016

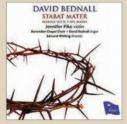


REISSUE/ ARCHIVE

JOSÉ ITURBI
Solo Piano
Recordings
APR
As reviewer
Patrick Rucker

says of this release of recordings by the Spanish pianist José Iturbi: 'A fascinating, often surprising set that rewards repeated listening.'

#### ► REVIEWED IN SEPTEMBER 2016



BEDNALL Stabat mater. Ave Maria. Marian Suite Benenden Chapel Choir / Edward Whiting Regent The British

composer already has a growing discography; this new addition focuses on his substantial and imaginative setting of the deeply moving Marian hymn.

► REVIEWED IN AWARDS 2016



#### **DVD/BLU-RAY**

**BRITTEN** The Rape of Lucretia

Sols; London Philharmonic Orchestra / Leo Hussain Opus Arte

A chance to see director Fiona Shaw's

powerful response to Britten's opera – its first return to Glyndebourne since the 1946 premiere – with excellent singing and playing throughout.

#### ► REVIEWED IN AWARDS 2016

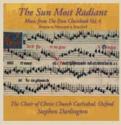


#### MENDELSSOHN String Quartets

String Quartets
Nos 3 & 5
Parker Quartet
Nimbus Alliance
The Parker
Quartet
continue their

Mendelssohn exploration with a masterclass in ensemble collaboration, rich in ideas and unity of vision. A very fine disc from an impressive group.

#### ► REVIEWED IN AWARDS 2016



#### 'THE SUN MOST RADIANT' Christ Church

Christ Church
Cathedral Choir,
Oxford /
Stephen Darlington

The latest

Avie

instalment in Christ Church's exploration of the Eton Choirbook is beautifully prepared and presented, with excellent singing throughout.

#### ► REVIEWED IN NOVEMBER 2016



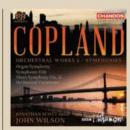
#### **BEETHOVEN**

Piano Sonatas, Vol 3 **Jean-Efflam Bavouzet** *pf* Chandos

This is a really remarkable

achievement. Bavouzet's playing seems to balance personality and precision, warm individuality with service to the score. A very fine Beethoven series reaches its end.

► REVIEWED IN DECEMBER 2016



#### COPLAND

Orchestral Works, Vol 2

BBC Philharmonic Orchestra / John Wilson

Chandos Disc two in

Wilson's Copland series takes us to less well-known works, but with the rigour of understanding and complete conviction that are this conductor's hallmark.

#### ► REVIEWED IN AWARDS 2016



## MENDELSSOHN Symphonies Nos 1

& 4
London Symphony
Orchestra / Sir
John Eliot Gardiner
LSO Live

LSO Live Sir John Eliot

Gardiner continues his Mendelssohn exploration with a First and Fourth of great style, his rapport with players and music deeply evident.

#### ► REVIEWED IN OCTOBER 2016



#### **JACKSON**

'Vox clara'
Truro Cathedral
Choir /
Christopher Gray
Regent
Regent brings us
another superb

contemporary choral disc, following its recent David Bednall success – this time of the imaginative and engaging music of composer Gabriel Jackson.

#### ► REVIEWED IN NOVEMBER 2016



#### VIVALDI. R PANUFNIK

'A Violin for All Seasons' BBC Symphony Orchestra / Tasmin Little vn

Chandos

Vivaldi-playing which draws on a modern orchestra's weight, not to mention on Little's virtuosity, while in Panufnik's piece we're taken on a culturally rich journey.

► REVIEWED IN DECEMBER 2016



#### MAHLER

Symphony No 10 Seattle Symphony Orchestra / Thomas Dausgaard Seattle Symphony Media

This is a very

impressive Mahler Tenth. Playing is of the highest order throughout, but, as is crucial in this work, Dausgaard's vision is both compelling and beautifully conveyed.

#### ► REVIEWED IN AWARDS 2016



#### REISSUE/

#### ARCHIVE BRITTEN A Midsummer Night's Dream Benjamin Britten

Testament
The premiere of

Britten's opera was heard by an audience of just 300 in Aldeburgh's Jubilee Hall – now you can join them, thanks to Testament's remastering.

#### ► REVIEWED IN NOVEMBER 2016



#### ADAMS. HARRIS

Violin Concertos Tamsin Waley-Cohen vn BBC Symphony Orchestra / Andrew Litton Signum

An outstanding performance of the Adams Concerto, but it's the addition of the beautifully played Harris Concerto which really makes this disc something special.

#### ► REVIEWED IN DECEMBER 2016



# 'ASPECTS' Aquarelle Guitar Quartet Chandos

This is a real joy to listen to, which isn't to say it's not also

reflective in places too. But the virtuosity and rapport demonstrated by this guitar quartet is a genuine delight throughout this wonderfully varied recital.

► REVIEWED IN JANUARY 2017

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gramophone.co.uk GRAMOPHONE FEBRUARY 2017 35

17th century, this 10-year-old ensemble specialises in English Baroque repertoire that has fallen by the wayside, as well as the odd curiosity from the Continent. This, their third disc, follows on from two explorations of music by the German émigré composer Johann Christoph Pepusch (Ramée, 11/16), and it is similarly sharp in focus.

If you've never heard of Josef Guretzky, the Moravian composer who toiled under the patronage of two bishops and a Bavarian Count, this release might make you feel like a connoisseur. We get Guretzky's only surviving violin concerto, along with four of his nine cello concertos, composed for Count Rudolf Franz Erwein of Schönborn in Wiesentheid, who adored the cello and paid a servant to carry his own around for him when travelling. The result reveals a musical personality that occasionally seems shy in coming forward.

That's because Guretzky, like many of his Central European contemporaries, bowed down to Italian musical practice; and the works displayed here follow the norms established by Vivaldi, Giovanni and Antonio Maria Bononcini and Antonio Caldara, with whom Guretzky may have studied. That said, there are subtle detours from the road map – in Guretzky's quirky rhythmic patterns, as well as his experiments with Baroque form. And what is most striking is the freshness and dynamism with which he generates his polyphony.

This music certainly brings out good things in the Tickle-Fiddlers, who fully justify their name. There is real joy in the music-making. The ensemble-playing, under the artistic direction of Robert Rawson, is crisp and buoyant. And even the soloists – cellist Kinga Gáborjáni, violinist Rodolfo Richter and harpsichordist David Wright, who contributes a delicate fugue by Bohuslav Matěj Černohorský – wear their virtuosity lightly. Hannah Nepil

#### **Mahler**

Symphony No 2, 'Resurrection'
Olena Tokar sop Hermine Haselböck mez
Czech Philharmonic Choir, Brno; Lille National
Orchestra / Jean-Claude Casadesus
Evidence (\$\mathbb{E}\) (2 EVCD027 (84' • DDD)
Recorded live at the Auditorium di Nouveau Siècle,



Lille, November 20 & 21, 2015

In November 2016 Mahler's manuscript score of the Resurrection sold

for the highest sum ever paid for such a document. It had been owned by Gilbert Kaplan, New York businessman and amateur maestro, who himself recorded the symphony three times. Perhaps you must be over 60 to find those statistics surprising. Twelve months earlier Jean-Claude Casadesus and his Orchestre National de Lille chose the same work to celebrate their 40-year history together, an interpretation seen as well as heard on the ARTE channel. Having built his ensemble from unpromising beginnings in one of the more depressed regions of France, Casadesus is to step down at the end of the current season. Previous achievements include a Mahler series on the Forlane label, the first from any French orchestra. While you can forget the explosive unanimity of Georg Solti and his ilk in this repertoire, the French conductor tries to make the best of the band's limitations, arguing plausibly enough in the (poorly translated) bookletnotes for light-textured Mahler. Should you be trying to place him in the context of his august artistic family, his mother is the veteran Gisèle Casadesus who played the elderly well-read woman bonding with Gérard Depardieu's illiterate handyman in My Afternoons with Margueritte (La tête en friche). There's something of the film's delicate Gallic sensibility here too.

The avoidance of emotional overload might pay dividends for some listeners were it not that Casadesus has a tendency to move things along rather abruptly, undermining the sense of continuity. His mezzo, Hermine Haselböck, is a fine singer whose 'Urlicht' is more straightforwardly conceived than Janet Baker's sublime effort for Leonard Bernstein, in keeping with the reading as a whole. Although there's no special frisson, the line is secure, the vibrato focused, and those impressed by her piano-accompanied Mahler songs (Bridge, 2/12) may wish to explore further. Not that the sound is altogether state-of-the-art, the soloists, as so often, made artificially present. A bigger problem is the conductor himself, not just huffing and puffing but, presumably, jumping up and down. The noises caught by the microphones make this an unlikely candidate for repeated listening. Closing applause is retained.

If you're after an audio-only *Resurrection*, Vladimir Jurowski in 2009 brings us closer to that special sense of universality and spiritual uplift which the music demands.

#### David Gutman

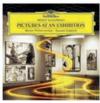
Selected comparisons: Soloists LSO, Bernstein

(2/06) (DG) 22 073 4089GH2 or 22 073 4088GH9 LPO, Jurowski (8/11) (LPO) LPO0054

#### Mussorgsky · Tchaikovsky

Mussorgsky Pictures at an Exhibition (orch Ravel). Night on the Bare Mountain Tchaikovsky Swan Lake, Op 20 - Waltz Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra / Gustavo Dudamel

DG (F) 479 6297GH (51' • DDD)



Pictures at an exhibition grace the cover of this *Pictures at an Exhibition*, the

result of a collaboration between Gustavo Dudamel, the Vienna Philharmonic and an El Sistema offshoot in Vienna. As with the vinyl-only account of Mendelssohn's *Scottish* (DG), the proceeds here go towards instruments for children in El Sistema proper.

A laudable cause, but not quite so laudable a performance. Oddly, it's short of the precise characterisation and febrile intensity we expect from Dudamel, traits both of which are also requirements of recommendable Mussorgsky. 'Il vecchio castello' has an attractive surface sheen, like the painting of an accomplished student: Valery Gergiev, an old master with the same orchestra, induces shivers at the fear of ghosts. In Dudamel's 'Ballet of the Unhatched Chicks', the poultry is rather portly. 'The Marketplace at Limoges' bustles along, but not merrily. As for 'Baba-Yaga', Dudamel takes an absurdist approach, as opposed to Gergiev's ferociously scary one.

Two-dimensional it all may be – an impression left, too, by boxy sound – but, even so, it's solid work. The Philharmonic play attractively, although they seem unsure whether to turn to showpiece mode or to go for something deeper. Tchaikovsky springs to mind throughout; hence the encore, I suppose, a charming sashay through the Waltz from Swan Lake, the strings swung in that wonderful Viennese way. The other filler is no more imaginative: Night on the Bare Mountain, in crisper focus than the Pictures, if still routine.

#### **David Allen**

Pictures – selected comparison: VPO, Gergiev (7/02) (PHIL) 468 526-2PH

Alpha (F) ALPHA218 (74' • DDD • T/t)

#### **Pintscher**

Bereshit<sup>a</sup>. Songs from Solomon's Garden<sup>b</sup>. Uriel<sup>c</sup>
<sup>b</sup>Evan Hughes *bar* <sup>c</sup>Éric-Maria Couturier *vc*<sup>c</sup>Dimitri Vassilakis *pf* <sup>ab</sup>
Ensemble Intercontemporain /
Matthias Pintscher



I'd read chatter on the internet talking up Matthias Pintscher's 2012 Bereshit, his

30-minute composition for large ensemble, as a great leap forward for the prodigiously talented German conductor and composer, now in his mid-forties. And since those days when Pintscher's music sailed uncomfortably close to unmediated borrowings from Berg and Henze, this composer-led performance by the Ensemble Intercontemporain, all detailed and fastidious, is indeed suggestive of a vision that is deepening.

The subject matter helps. Concerned with the very act of Creation, this music wisely avoids figurative sound-painting. Pintscher's representation of chaos is instead mirrored inside the piecemeal unfolding of a structure that we hear painfully assembling itself, sometimes with thrilling undertones of a composer confessing 'I don't know where this might be headed either'. Bereshit is a Hebrew word implying different meanings of 'beginning': first breaths taken, the bigbang of Creation, raw expression swilling around the ether before any language

existed to articulate it. But composerly uncertainty and painful assemblages are, it turns out, an illusion embedded into a score that is motivated by wanting to reveal process over defining any finished product.

Sounds crack, splutter, fade. The piece begins before the music, with a gong sustaining a hardly present tremble of energy as super-high string harmonics (on double bass?) reach towards a fragile ozone layer. Deep-toned contrabass clarinet sorties start to plunder the bowels of the orchestra, searching for a core that has yet to exist. Instruments gesticulate without necessarily forming notes; then Pintscher gradually, imperceptibly even, draws together prominent pitches until a functioning harmony begins to operate. And you know it is operational because a swarm of interrupting woodblocks - in a gesture perhaps referencing Morton Feldman's Violin and Orchestra - registers as a rude, jolting structural shock.

The gestural language of Songs from Solomon's Garden (2009) and Uriel for cello and piano (2011-12), immaculately performed as they are, can't quite match the unknowable mysteries of Bereshit a smartly imagined and beautifully choreographed glimpse into a world beyond our own. Philip Clark

#### Reger

Violin Concerto, Op 101 (adaptation by Rudolf Kolisch) Elena Denisova vn

Gustav Mahler Ensemble / Alexei Kornienko Oehms (F) OC1862 (47' • DDD) Recorded 2003



This is a fascinating slant on an effective arrangement, though the unhelpfully

reverberant recording rather mitigates against total enjoyment. In this instance what more helps the effect is that tempos are kept up to speed, which serves to underline discernible parallels with Elgar's Violin Concerto (premiered in 1910, two years after the Reger), especially the relationship of tutti to solo material and the violin-writing: try the closing minutes of the first movement. A more richly recorded alternative of Rudolf Kolisch's chamber version by the excellent violinist Winfried Rademacher with the Linos Ensemble is very much slower, thus minimising those Elgarian parallels. Listen to 26'00" on the Capriccio CD or 21'32" on this new Oehms recording and you'll hear what I mean.



Whichever way you hear it, Reger's Concerto is a much-underrated work. Reger himself somewhat immodestly thought that he had extended the series of great concertos by Beethoven and Brahms. And there were some who would have agreed with him. Schoenberg reckoned Reger's music deserved frequent exposure, primarily because, as he put it, Reger was a genius. I can't argue with that, though those with little or no taste for bulky, thickset chromaticism probably will. Kolisch's chamber reworking of the Concerto for Schoenberg's Association for Private Music Performance (scored for flute, clarinet, horn, harmonium, piano, and strings) sounds like a genuine labour of love. In fact it's so skilfully wrought that for much of the time you're hardly aware that reduced forces have been brought into play.

On the better-recorded Capriccio CD Rademacher performs beautifully, especially for in rapt closing pages of the slow movement, and the Linos Ensemble prove musically persuasive collaborators. But I prefer the swifter tempos chosen by Elena Denisova with the Gustav Mahler Ensemble under Alexei Kornienko, although I'm less taken with their interpretative approach overall, which strikes as less personal than that of their rival. Still, those faster speeds may well tip the balance for some listeners - they certainly help hold your attention - and if the sound isn't a problem, Denisova and her collaborators could well provide the preferred option. Rob Cowan

Selected comparison:

Rademacher, Linos Ens (CAPR) C5137

#### Schulhoff

'Forbidden Music'

Piano Concerto [No 2], Op 43°. Suite No 3. Suite dansante en jazz. Ironies, Op 34b Daahoud Salim, bNadezda Filippova pf aAmsterdam Conservatoire Symphony Orchestra / Andrew Grams

Challenge Classics (F) CC72730 (59' • DDD)



Erwin Schulhoff's Second Piano Concerto of 1923 is a strange beast, opening

among chiming solo figurations, with woodwinds intoning above them, then by 1'51" (on this recording) slipping into 'song without end' mode, complete with a weepy violin accompaniment. Pianist Frank-Immo Zichner (with the Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin under Roland Kluttig) seems less at home with this aspect of the piece than does Daahoud Salim, though

when it comes to the hard-hitting *Allegro alla jazz* finale Zichner goes for all-out-aggression, at least initially. It's an impressive work, with expansive cadenza episodes (solo piano and solo violin again engage unaccompanied for a chunk of the finale) and there's some very mysterious orchestral writing around the centre of the piece.

The other 'accompanied' composition included is for piano four hands (where Salim is joined by Nadezda Filippova), the Ironies, Op 34 of 1923, its closing movements - Allegro deciso and Tempo de fox – dominated by the brand of 'theatre jazz' that was at the hub of Schulhoff's 'Roaring Twenties' phase. The Third Suite for the left hand (1926) is more securely grounded in mainstream 20th-century piano music, the Prelude in Debussy, the third movement unmistakably reflecting Bartók in Hungarian 'folk dance' mode, the finale more along the lines of Ravel. But perhaps the most impressive work on the disc is the Suite dansante en jazz of 1931, where jazz is absorbed in a more sophisticated way, Gershwin a prominent influence, the two slow movements - Waltz and Slow - being especially lovely.

Daahoud Salim has obviously taken great pains over all these pieces, though Kathryn Stott also does a pretty impressive job with the Suite. Her programming context is entirely solo (including the *Hot Music* or 'Ten Studies in Syncopation'), whereas Salim's winning account of the concerto, where he's very alertly supported by the Symphony Orchestra of the Conservatorium van Amsterdam under Andrew Grams, adds plenty of flavour to his programme. An enjoyable disc, very well recorded. **Rob Cowan** 

Concerto – selected comparison: Zichner, DSO Berlin, Kluttig (9/14) (CAPR) C5197 Suite dansante – selected comparison: Stott (7/03) (BIS) BIS-CD1249

#### Schumann

'In Search of Original Sound' Cello Concerto, Op 129 $^{\rm a}$ . Symphony No 2, Op 61  $^{\rm a}$ Jan Vogler  ${\it VC}$ 

**Dresden Festival Orchestra / Ivor Bolton**Sony Classical (F) 88985 37212-2 (59' • DDD)



The album's title implies some form of pioneering research but in fact indicates

that Jan Vogler, Intendant of the Dresden Festival since 2008, has joined its orchestra in restringing his 'Ex Castelbarco/Fau' Stradivari with gut. The exercise created for Vogler 'a whole new feeling' and the use of period instruments and practices is, he avers, 'the key to a world of imagination'. His instrument retains the grain of its sound, rich in its mid-range and singing plangently as the music takes the left hand up the fingerboard. There's an occasional gruffness, too, and it's clear that Vogler doesn't feel the need to seek beauty of sound in Schumann's knottier passages.

The disc's packaging doesn't specifically spell out that these recordings were taken live but there are a number of noises off. Nevertheless, Vogler – placed ideally against the orchestra, his sound growing naturally out of the *tuttis* – shows few signs of awkwardness in Schumann's challenging writing. Another recent period-instrument recording with Jean-Guihen Queyras, the Freiburg Baroque Orchestra and Pablo Heras-Casado may be 'cleaner' but the two approaches are complementary, and the sense of involvement in this one is undeniably infectious.

There is more competition in the Second Symphony, both on period instruments and on modern ones played with period manners. Ivor Bolton makes the most of Schumann's obsessive rhythms and shapes the insistent counterpoint of the finale so that the arrival of the near-quote from Beethoven's An die ferne Geliebte seems to occur with divine inevitability, crowned by its combination with the brass fanfares from the symphony's opening. John Eliot Gardiner and his Orchestre Révolutionnaire et Romantique perhaps drive through this music with a greater sense of assurance but Bolton and his Dresden players make an admirable case for the troublesome Second.

#### **David Threasher**

Cello Concerto – selected comparison: Queyras, Freiburg Baroque Orch, Heras-Casado (5/16) (HARM) HMC90 2197 Symphony No 2 – selected comparison:

ORR, Gardiner (6/98) (ARCH) 457 591-2AH3

#### **Shostakovich**

Violin Concertos - No 1, Op 77<sup>a</sup>; No 2, Op 129<sup>b</sup> **Frank Peter Zimmermann** *vn* 

NDR Elbphilharmonie Orchestra / Alan Gilbert BIS (F) 98 BIS2247 (62' • DDD/DSD)

Recorded live at the Laeiszhalle, Hamburg, December 6 & 9, 2012<sup>a</sup>, and October 29-30, 2015<sup>b</sup>



Of this pairing of Shostakovich's two violin concertos, it is Frank Peter

Zimmermann's performance of the First which will raise eyebrows. It's fast.



'Lyrical ease': Frank Peter Zimmermann plays Shostakovich

In the first-movement Nocturne he's nearly three minutes faster than David Oistrakh, the concerto's dedicatee, himself pacier than most violinists. And Zimmermann clocks in a couple of minutes faster in the Passacaglia (nearly four minutes quicker than Maxim Vengerov or Sergey Khachatryan). But is Zimmermann breaking the speed limit? He uses the autograph manuscript, with Shostakovich's own metronome markings and bowing instructions. In my Boosey & Hawkes edition the first-movement Moderato is marked crotchet=92, and this is the pretty much the tempo Alan Gilbert sets the NDR Elbphilharmonie. Likewise the Passacaglia's Andante (crotchet=84). It certainly makes you sit up and hear this concerto in a new light, but the flow impedes the dark sense of brooding we're used to feeling.

Zimmermann pursues the Passacaglia's *cantabile* line with lyrical ease but can also produce a darker, uglier sound when appropriate, spitting ferociously in the Scherzo and producing icy glissandos. With Oistrakh, every note is drenched in pain or doused in sarcasm. Zimmermann doesn't plumb those depths but does

conjure up impish colour in the nosethumbing Burlesque.

The performance of the Second Concerto is at more conventional tempos. Zimmermann floats a ghostly danse macabre in the first movement, where orchestral flecks are reminiscent of the Tenth Symphony. The tom-tom makes a disappointingly dull thud but the muted NDR horns snarl fiercely. Certainly a disc worth hearing.

#### Mark Pullinger

Concertos Nos 1 & 2 – selected comparisons:
Vengerov, LSO, Rostropovich
(2/95<sup>R</sup>, A/97<sup>R</sup>) (APEX) 2564 68039-7
Khachatryan, French Nat Orch, Masur
(11/06) (NAIV) V5025
Concerto No 1 – seleted comparison:
Oistrakh, Leningrad PO, Mravinsky
(1/59<sup>R</sup>, 4/88<sup>R</sup>) (REGI) RRC1385
Concerto No 2 – selected comparison:
Oistrakh, Moscow PO, Kondrashin
(3/69<sup>R</sup>) (ALTO) ALC1062

#### Shostakovich · Tchaikovsky

Shostakovich Violin Concerto No 2, Op 129
Tchaikovsky Violin Concerto, Op 35
Linus Roth vn London Symphony
Orchestra / Thomas Sanderling
Challenge Classics ® CC72689 (74' • DDD)



Although not trumpeted anywhere on the sleeve, the booklet-notes claim

Linus Roth's recording as 'the original echt-Tchaikovsky version' of his evergreen Violin Concerto. Based on Henle's Urtext of the piano reduction, nine changes are made from the usual score, of which the booklet cites just four, among them a slur lasting four notes instead of six and a couple of notes in the double-stopped passage (track 4, from 8'21") played an octave higher. It's pretty minimal stuff. The only significant change is in the Canzonetta, where at bar 40 (track 5, 2'11") the usual score instructs the violinist to remove the mute which had been deployed for the opening phrases. It's not wholly new - my Eulenberg score (2007) doesn't contain it either - and James Ehnes and Jennifer Koh also keep the mute on for the entire movement.

But what of Roth's performance? His tone is strong and dark, with plenty of sinew, even if his playing can be overemphatic compared with Ehnes's finer account. Roth takes a good two minutes longer over the first movement, putting him closer to Koh's ruminative reading. Sadly, Roth is not helped by an over-reverberant recording in LSO St Lukes which muddies the orchestral contributions.

The Tchaikovsky is coupled with Shostakovich's Second Concerto, given a gritty, deliberate reading, without the hairraising excitement or sardonic bite of the Oistrakh/Kondrashin partnership that gave the work's 1967 premiere. Mark Pullinger

Tchaikovsky – selected comparisons:

Koh, Odense SO, Vedernikov (11/16)

(CEDI) CDR90000 166

Ehnes, Sydney SO, Ashkenazy (3/12) (ONYX) ONYX4076 Shostakovich – selected comparison:

Oistrakh, Moscow PO, Kondrashin (ALTO) ALC1062

#### **Smetana**

Má vlast

Bamberg Symphony Orchestra / Jakub Hrůša Tudor 🕒 🏖 TUDOR7196 (81' • DDD/DSD)



In a market crammed with recordings of *Má vlast* – several as historically significant

as they are musically penetrating – the 35-year-old Czech conductor Jakub Hrůša is trying hard to make his presence felt. His 2010 release with the Prague Philharmonia was marked by its exuberance and transparence, thanks in part to the ensemble's chamber dimensions. With the Bamberg Symphony Orchestra he achieves the same effect, while ramping up the drama a few notches.

Admittedly, it takes him a while to relax into it; the first four movements reveal all the diligence of a still-maturing conductor doing his duty by his country's musical deity. The result is straightforward, frill-free playing, with a keen ear for phrasing and detail. He paints the landscape vividly, whether the rapids of St John's or the dark shadows of Bohemia's meadows and forests, but any number of interpretations will do that. For one that can stand up among the best of them – the Ančerl; the Kubelík; the Smetáček – you need an extra level of emotional charge.

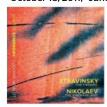
At last, Hrůša provides this in the final two movements. Here, in music often dismissed as an afterthought and sometimes jettisoned in performance altogether, we find raw energy, theatricality and, perhaps most strikingly, pathos. There's plenty of it in 'Blaník', where Hrůša lingers over the delicate interplay of oboe, horn and clarinet. Moreover, 'Tábor' speaks with

a revolutionary zeal that reminds us why Smetana wrote it in the first place: as a patriotic portrait of the Hussites, who introduced Protestantism to Bohemia a century before it hit Germany. Recommended. Hannah Nepil

#### Stravinsky · Nikolaev

**Nikolaev** The Sinewaveland: Homage to Jimi Hendrix<sup>a</sup> **Stravinsky** The Firebird (1910 version)<sup>b</sup> <sup>a</sup>**Elisa Barston** *V*77

Seattle Symphony Orchestra / Ludovic Morlot Seattle Symphony Media (F) SSM1014 (59' • DDD) Recorded live at Benaroya Hall, Seattle, aOctober 18, 2011; bJune 19 & 21, 2014



Ludovic Morlot has garnered great reviews with the Seattle Symphony and it's

clear to hear why in a fine, purposeful account of the original 1910 version of Stravinsky's *The Firebird*. It's a virtuoso showcase for orchestra and there are several highlights. Spidery *col legno* strings nag as the firebird begs to be released (track 6, 1'41") and Morlot's princesses sparkle in their innocent game with the golden apples (track 7). The 'Round Dance' flows, strings sighing plaintively, and the triumphant finale – taken swiftly – features a pearly flute solo.

Competition is strong, however. Charles Dutoit's Decca recording in Montreal still dazzles, while Valery Gergiev and the Kirov Orchestra are feverishly exciting. The best recording of recent years comes from the Bergen Philharmonic under Andrew Litton, splendidly played and superbly engineered. In the 'Infernal Dance', Litton whips up a heady cocktail of sulphur and fury, while Morlot's slower pace, despite a lovely hollow timpani rumble, drains it of some excitement.

The performance suffers the disadvantages of being recorded in concert. There appears to be a lot of close-miking, which robs the sound of the opulent sheen the Bergen Phil enjoy. Also, in the 'Daybreak' section, in the studio the Bergen trumpets can be positioned to surround the listener, whereas in concert, the Seattle trumpets are in a fixed position on stage.

Vladimir Nikolaev's *The Sinewaveland:* Homage to Jimi Hendrix is the unusual coupling, turning the entire orchestra into a rock guitar, often stomping frenetically, ending with a unison 'yeah' which is far from cool. Sitting it alongside Stravinsky's masterpiece does it few favours.

Mark Pullinger

Firebird - selected comparisons:

Montreal SO, Dutoit (10/86\*) (DECC) 478 3028DB7 Kirov Orch, Gergiev (7/98) (PHIL) 🗗 446 715-2DH Bergen PO, Litton (6/12) (BIS) BIS-SACD1874 See The Musician and the Score on page 46

#### **Tchaikovsky**

Symphonies - No 4, Op 36; No 5, Op 64; No 6, 'Pathétique', Op 74 Arctic Philharmonic Orchestra / Christian Lindberg

BIS (F) (2) . S BIS2178 (129' • DDD/DSD)



In a foreword to the booklet-notes for this new BIS release, superstar trombonist

and composer turned conductor Christian Lindberg writes of his childhood obsession with the Tchaikovsky symphonies and in particular his fascination with the disparity of tempos revealed in different interpretations. His return to the composer's metronome markings would, he says, probably mark out his recordings as 'different'. Not really.

It is true that the impulse and imperative of these symphonies depend to a great extent on the momentum of those tempo markings - but Lindberg is hardly alone in pursuing the notion that Tchaikovsky's innate 'classicism' ultimately trumps the age-old temptation to over-romanticise these marvellous pieces. Only a couple of months ago Semyon Bychkov's splendid new recording of the Pathétique (I have to say in a different league from this newcomer) reminded me that the edge-ofreason first movement is twice as effective if the impending crisis of the development is in part signalled by a swifter (as indicated), more anxiously songful reading of the lyric second subject. Lindberg achieves that, too - febrile is perhaps the word. But he and his Arctic Philharmonic Orchestra give us less of the emotive subtext than Bychkov. Atmosphere, too, is lacking here; and, to take just one technical example, when the clarinet switches to bassoon in the super-hushed pppppp moments before the thunderclap of the development it is neither quiet nor seamless enough (I still think there is a sound case for switching to bass clarinet here). Tension is dissipated.

On the plus side, Lindberg maximises the dramatic juxtaposition of the march Scherzo and final *Adagio* by pulling off an *attacca* that is rarely achievable in the concert hall, when applause invariably intervenes, and he surely makes a *cri de cœur* of the last great climax.



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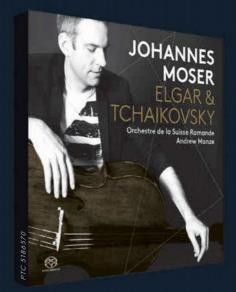


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Johannes Moser, cello

Orchestre de la Suisse Romande

Andrew Manze

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Otherwise we have a thoroughly decent but not exactly heart-stopping account of the Fifth Symphony, with a first-movement *Allegro con anima* that is certainly *con anima* but without the heat of a Mravinsky or Markevitch. Much to savour in the shapely slow movement, too, though again the Russians have an ardour all of their own.

The Fourth is for me the most successful of the three performances, with Lindberg balancing urgency with reflective otherworldliness in the first movement and splashiness with the ineffably wistful in the finale. Oddly (given who he is), the trombones don't really make their mark in the momentous climax of the development or the moment where fate comes knocking one more time in the finale. There is greater immediacy in the woodwind balance, with characterful playing to the fore in the folksy, plainspeaking second movement.

But competition in these pieces remains impossibly fierce and, eccentric or not, once you've heard Mravinsky and the Leningrad you are spoiled for life.

#### **Edward Seckerson**

Selected comparison – coupled as above: Leningrad PO, Mravinsky (6/61<sup>R</sup>, 10/61<sup>R</sup>, 11/61<sup>R</sup>, 8/87) (DG) 419 745-2GH2 or 477 5911GOR2

#### **Tishchenko**

Concerto for Violin, Piano and String Orchestra<sup>a</sup>. Symphony No 8. Three Songs to Poems of Marina Tsvetayeva (orch Rezetdinov)<sup>b</sup>

<sup>b</sup>Mila Shkirtil mez <sup>a</sup>Chingiz Osmanov vn

<sup>a</sup>Nikolai Mazhara pf St Petersburg State
Symphony Orchestra / Yuri Serov

Naxos M 8 573343 (60' • DDD)



Boris Tishchenko's last numbered symphony, composed two years before his

death in 2010 (a ninth was left unfinished), is a surprisingly mild affair. Surprising, that is, if you are expecting anything on the epic lines of the majority of the previous seven, or indeed anything as intense as the separate series of five 'Dante' Symphonies. But it doesn't do to underestimate this composer, who was once touted, especially among his fellow Leningrad/ St Petersburgers, as the natural successor to Shostakovich. Perhaps the first movement's constant moves from innocence to corruption, followed by their intertwining, are the whole point. In fact the real clue is that the piece was intended as a complement to Schubert's Unfinished to be performed after it, without a break.

The second movement is especially replete with echoes of that work, and the darker but still lean-scored finale, with a rabbit-out-of-the-hat B major conclusion, is presumably a modern hypothetical parallel to Schubert's unwritten scherzo, or scherzo-cum-finale. Intriguing, to say the least.

The Tsvetayeva Songs, from 1970 but here in a refined 2014 orchestration by Tishchenko's pupil Leonid Rezetdinov, are worthy companion pieces to the Shostakovich settings of the same poet from three years later. There are some revealing published letters between the two composers concerning choices of texts, and this recording puts flesh on those ideas.

The Concerto for violin, piano and string orchestra of 2006 has been recorded before, with a fraction more urgency and Soviet-style trenchancy, though in a less natural-sounding ambience than Naxos's. There is a good deal more craziness - of a Schnittkean kind - here than in the other works on the new disc, albeit more within the gravitational pull of 'familiar' melody and harmony than in the case of Tishchenko's Moscow-based rival for the post-Shostakovich crown. The boisterous Rondo second movement should be lapped up by anyone attuned to the hard-edged, calculatedly stupid-ironic combination of Shostakovich and Ives that became fashionable in Soviet music from the mid-1960s. Easier to resist is the Nymanesque blatancy of the finale, where irony is hard to detect.

There are occasional ragged edges in the playing, but more importantly a strong communicative presence under Yuri Serov's guiding spirit, as we might expect from his sympathetic booklet-notes.

#### **David Fanning**

Concerto – selected comparison:

A Rozhdestvensky, Postnikova, Stg Orch of St Petersburg, G Rozhdestvensky (FUGA) FUG702

#### **Vaughan Williams**

Fantasia<sup>a</sup>. The Lark Ascending<sup>b</sup>.
The Solent<sup>c</sup>. Suite of Six Short Pieces<sup>d</sup>

<sup>b</sup> Jennifer Pike vn adSina Kloke pf abcChamber
Orchestra of New York / Salvatore Di Vittorio
Naxos 

8 573530 (62' • DDD)



Top billing on Naxos's cover goes to *The Lark Ascending* but the main interest for

RVW aficionados surrounds the first recording of the 1920 *Suite of Six Short Pieces* for piano. Annotator Paul Conway mentions James Brown's arrangement for string orchestra of these unpretentious miniatures (made under the composer's supervision and published in 1923 as the *Charterhouse Suite*) and rightly calls out this music's stylistic links with the neoclassical (and, to my mind, underrated) Concerto for violin and string orchestra, which appeared in 1925; indeed, the Suite's fourth-movement 'Slow Air' has something of the grace and serenity that also inhabit the concerto's touching *Adagio* centrepiece.

Sina Kloke plays with agreeable discernment and assurance both here and in the early Fantasia (1896-1902, and revised two years later) - a 21-minute creation of endearing ambition and redblooded drama, with solo writing of frequently big-boned bravura ('Brahms meets Liszt' would be a good description). Salvatore Di Vittorio and his Chamber Orchestra of New York tender spirited support but ultimately this newcomer is, I think, eclipsed by Mark Bebbington's pioneering (and more accommodatingly engineered) account with George Vass and the Ulster Orchestra (Somm, 12/11).

The disc opens with the 1902-03 symphonic poem The Solent, whose memorable main theme RVW plundered for his Sea Symphony and Ninth Symphony, as well as the 1955 film score The England of Elizabeth. Di Vittorio secures a watchful rather than especially compelling rendering - Paul Daniel's splendid RLPO version remains preferable (Albion, 11/13). In The Lark Ascending Jennifer Pike soars aloft most bewitchingly and is ably partnered by Di Vittorio and company, but the overall effect is rather too analytical for comfort (both Jean Pougnet and Hugh Bean in their vintage performances with Boult undoubtedly distil more in the way of fragrant poetry). In sum, a resourceful programme but artistically and sonically a bit of a mixed bag.

Andrew Achenbach

#### Vivaldi · Jiránek

Jiránek Violin Concerto in D minor Vivaldi The Four Seasons, Op 8 Nos 1-4 Ars Antiqua Austria / Gunar Letzbor vn Challenge Classics (F) CC72700 (60' • DDD/DSD)



It's a funny thing that, while we may bang on about how difficult it is to release a really

distinctive new Vivaldi Four Seasons

recording, everyone appears to manage it pretty well. In fact, I'd even go so far as to say that *The Four Seasons* has become the perfect vehicle for musicians to express their individuality. Take Adrian Chandler's beautiful recording with La Serenissima (Avie, 10/15), at once full of dramatic spice, delicacy and nuance, or Fabio Biondi's warm, fluid recordings with Europa Galante (Naïve, 4/92, or Virgin/Erato, 11/01).

Gunar Letzbor and Ars Antiqua Austria have certainly brought a distinctive new take on the concertos here, beginning with considerably slower tempos than we're used to from period bands, and particularly pronounced dynamic contrasts. You'll also notice a prominent organ within the continuo. Tone-wise they've really shaken things up too, with a rough, scratching attack their dominant modus operandi; listen to the viola's unusually idiomatic Spring dog barks for instance, or the violins in Summer's first movement. Then there's their forte sound, which features a good deal of percussive twanging and slapping. The result is a sound that packs far more of a punch volume-wise than one would usually expect of such oneto-a-part forces, but I can't say I actually enjoyed the overall ride.

Equally, Letzbor himself is passionate but also often rather scrappy of attack, even accounting for the deliberately sackcloth signature sound, and while his decision to initially go chromatically downwards on those high B trills of his first Spring entry stands out for originality, it doesn't sound very nice. Or, indeed, like happy birdsong, and ultimately this is a programmatic work. It's very possible that all this might make for an exciting live performance, but on the stereo I'm afraid it is more grating than gratifying. Charlotte Gardner

#### **András Schiff**

Recorded live in Moscow, 1974

'The V International Tchaikovsky Competition'
Brahms Piano Concerto No 1, Op 15°. Variations and Fugue on a Theme by Handel, Op 24
Liszt La leggierezza, S144 No 2
Pirumov Scherzo
Prokofiev Piano Sonata No 3, Op 28
Rachmaninov Étude-tableau, Op 33 No 7
Shostakovich Prelude and Fugue, Op 87 No 15
Tchaikovsky Piano Concerto No 1, Op 23°.
Thème original et variations, Op 19 No 6
András Schiff pf°Moscow Radio Symphony
Orchestra / Dmitry Kitaenko
Melodiya (M) (2) MELCD100 2386 (144' • ADD)



Given his stature as a philosopher/pianist and his public comments

disparaging piano contests, it is easy to forget that András Schiff briefly trotted the competition boards when he was young. Indeed, the 20-year-old Schiff got positive notices in the 1974 Moscow Tchaikovsky Competition, although he was ultimately placed fourth, yielding to first prize winner Andrei Gavrilov.

Before discussing the musical qualities of these archival recordings from the competition that feature Schiff, it must be said that the recorded sound is horribly strident and tinny in the solo selections' loudest passages, as if the pianist were competing on a bar-room upright, although his nuanced soft playing comes across relatively unscathed.

Schiff obviously prepared the Rachmaninov E flat Étude-tableau and the Prokofiev Third Sonata to a proverbial T, but the interpretations seem acquired rather than instinctive, as is the arguably overthought Liszt 'La leggierezza'. Conversely, Schiff completely 'gets' the



### GRAMOPHONE Collector

### NEW FROM NEOS AND WERGO

Richard Whitehouse delves into a pile of discs showcasing a range of modern European composers



Oboist Albert Mayer and the Tonkünstler Orchestra revel in Enjott Schneider's ironic neoclassicism

erman labels remain steadfast in promoting new music, with this selection taking in seven composers born four decades apart. That York Höller (b1944) is the senior figure is evidence not of reaction, but of a perspective that has evolved across 50 years in string quartet music alone. Hence the pointillist brevity of Drei Fragmente (1966), the textural diffusion between instruments and electronics of Antiphon (1976), the Bartókian gestures of his Second Quartet (1997) and the reassessment of an earlier Germanic expressive tradition in Zwiegestalt (2008) - where pianist Markus Bellheim matches the Minguet Quartet in unwavering commitment.

The large output of **Enjott Schneider** (*b*1950) takes in the range of classical and commercial genres, with the latest discs of Wergo's survey illustrating his inclusiveness. 'Bach, Dracula, Vivaldi & Co' comprises four *concertante* works that revel in ironic neoclassicism or hollow postmodernism depending on taste, with *Draculissimo* (2010) a 'concerto grosso' redolent of HK Gruber in mingled obliquity and slapstick. 'Shadows in the Dark' is a more disconcerting listen – hence the restive modality of *Phoenix* (2001), a 'mythical poem' whose soulful

oboe part complements its volatile use in *Dark Journey* (2015) with allusions to the ill-fated Hans Rott, then *Neidhart's Nightmare* (2009) quotes the (in)famous Minnesinger in a 'courtly love song' alternating eloquence and ribaldry. With its dynamic solo playing and the Tonkünstler-Orchester under Kevin John Edusei impressive in support, the latter disc is required listening.

Romanian-born **Violeta Dinescu** (*b*1953) is respected not least for her flute music, with Carin Levine a dedicated exponent. The five miniatures of Auf dem Tagebuch (2011) are a pithily restrained guide to current solo techniques, as are those of Blick (2015) in terms of ensemble poise. Larger pieces emphasise part-writing as intimate as it is lucid - whether in the timbral interplay with four horns of Die Glocke im Meer (2008), the subdued plangency with piano in Kata (1990), oblique playfulness with harp of Auf der Suche nach Mozart (1983) or deadpan humour with violin and piano in *Ichthys* (1991). All inquiring flautists need to investigate this.

**Thierry Pécou** (b1965) has been credited with bringing the sound of Latin America back into the European orbit, and it is this French composer's Caribbean

ancestry that is most audible here. The three flutes of *Changó* (1993) are deployed in two movements whose evocation of Afro-Cuban deities moves from song-like lyricism to dance-like energy. Colouristic subtlety and instrumental finesse is surveyed in *Marcha de la humanidad* prior to its explosive climax, whereas *Orquoy* (2012) headily evinces shamanistic and ritualistic qualities. Under Jonathan Stockhammer, the Orchestre National de France ably surmounts the challenges of this music.

Marcus Antonius Wesselmann (b1965) conceals his provocation behind the abstraction of his titles. Dezett (2007) is a 'chaos concert' with piano confronting an ensemble that recalls the hardhitting minimalism of Andriessen, while Duodezett (2002) is a sequence of 'phases de deux' where violin and cello confront and integrate with the main group, and Undezett (2000) draws on 'opera fragments' as sardonic as the Bulgakov novella that inspired them. The Fight Will Go On (2013) is a 'chamber concerto' whose 19 soloists elaborate a Spanish Civil War anthem as combatively as are these performances from Ensemble Modern with Franck Ollu.

Czech new music has a totemic figure in **Ondřej Adámek** (*b*1979), though the extended vocal technique of *Polednice* 

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(2013) is more Ligeti than Dvořák, and Nôise (2009) similarly recalls Xenakis in its anarchic take on Japanese puppet theatre. Of the orchestral works, Dusty Rusty Hush (2007) bracingly reinvents machine-age music for the digital age, while Endless Steps (2008) is a perpetuum mobile with stasis and dynamism held in fractious accord. Five more pieces feature on the DVD, two of those for the 'air-machines' which confirm Adámek as an inventor of Cage-like panache. An important addition to Wergo's Deutscher Musikrat series.

Finally to Johannes K Schachtner (b1985), four decades younger than Höller though closest to him of all these composers in his concern to balance innovation with historical awareness. So Symphonischer Essay (2016) pursues its diverting odyssey around and about the key of F, while Air - an Samuels Aerophon (2013) might make a pertinent entrée into Strauss's Alpine Symphony, then the percussion-driven Inventions III-V (2016) find unlikely accommodation between Bach and Varèse. Best are the vocal works - the lucid elegance of Quatre tombeaux de vent (2013) and scenic immediacy of the ballad Aufstieg (2010). Markus Elsner secures vividly characterful playing from Ensemble Zeitsprung, itself poised for international status. 6

#### THE RECORDINGS



**Höller** 'String Quartets (and more)' **Minguet Qt; Markus Bellheim** *pf* Neos © NEOS11518



Schneider 'Bach, Dracula, Vivaldi & Co' Tonkünstler Orch / Kevin John Edusei Wergo (F) WER5114-2



Schneider 'Shadows in the Dark'

Tonkünstler Orch / Kevin John Edusei
Wergo ® WER5115-2



**Dinescu** 'Diary' - FI Wks **Carin Levine et al** Wergo (F) WER7324-2



**Pécou** Orchestral Works **FNO / Jonathan Stockhammer** Wergo © WER7318-2



Wesselmann Ensemble Works, Vol 29 Ens Modern / Franck Ollu Neos ® NEOS11609



Adámek 'Körper und Seele'
Various artists
Wergo (F) (CD + ₩)WER6419-2



**Schachtner** 'Works for Ensemble' **Ens Zeitsprung / Markus Elsner** Neos © NEOS11602 sardonic spikiness of Shostakovich's D flat Prelude and Fugue, balancing the latter's rapidly spiralling lines brilliantly. Brahms's Handel Variations reveal comparable attention to ornamental and polyphonic niceties and unified tempo relationships as in Schiff's later commercial live recording. He brings similar care and forethought to the Tchaikovsky Variations. Written expressly for the competition, Alexander Pirumov's Scherzo juxtaposes intriguing, widely spaced soft passages with unmemorable motoric padding: Schiff plays this generic academic piano music as if it were a deathless masterpiece.

The piano appears less clangorous in the Tchaikovsky and Brahms first concertos but the skewed balances make the Moscow Radio Orchestra sound even more underrehearsed and tonally dicey than they are (to be fair, they find their centre in the finale of the Brahms). Unlike Schiff's chamber-like underplaying of the Tchaikovsky's outer movements in his commercial recording under Georg Solti, here he assumes the flashy virtuoso pose that he would soon eschew. Many of the Brahms concerto's salient details foreshadow Schiff's excellent and often underrated later traversal (also with Solti), such as the first movement's earnestly projected cross-rhythms, the Adagio's breadth and harmonic tension, plus the lightness and evenness of the finale's passages in trills.

Ultimately my sonic caveats may dissuade general listeners from acquiring this release. Still, in light of Schiff's latterday acclaim as one of the Austro-German canon's primary keepers of the flame, so to speak, it is fascinating to encounter his youthful counterpart live, unedited, under pressure and on the cusp of finding his pianistic voice.

Jed Distler

# 'New South American Discoveries'

Agudelo El sombrerón Errázuriz La Caravana Fernández Una música escondida<sup>a</sup> Gervasoni Icarus Grossmann Wayra Luzuriaga Responsorio Vega Música muisca Vergara Mecánica

 $^{a}$ Kristian Ofstad Lindbert, Sveinung Bjelland pfNorwegian Radio Orchestra / Miquel Harth-Bedoya

Harmonia Mundi (F) HMU90 7670 (65' • DDD)



These eight composers represent six Latin American nations, yet there are ties that draw their disparate voices together. The most conspicuous shared trait is a rhythmic insistence that may be driving or grounding or both. It's front and centre in Responsorio (2000) by the Ecuadorian composer Diego Luzuriaga, where the percussion evokes 'a fast human heartbeat' as part of a ceremonial colloquy. In Victor Agudelo's vividly coloured, delightfully ominous tone-poem El sombrerón (2009), the repeating rhythms signal the arrival on horseback of the traditional folk figure who frightens drunkards and gamblers - the Colombian equivalent of César Franck's tone poem Le chasseur maudit, perhaps. Diego Vega, also from Colombia, looks further back to pre-Hispanic times in Música muisca (2009), a compact, ritualistic dance rhapsody.

In these works, one might say that the composers confront the past in order to find their place in the present. Sebastián Errázuriz, from Chile, takes on the pitch-black subject of Pinochet's 'Caravana de la Muerte' (Death Caravan) and the murder of one of that nation's great musical educators in La Caravana (2003). If the music can't really capture the horrific subject matter, it's still effective as an evocation of creepy, cancerous inexorability. Sebastián Vergara, another Chilean, takes a more abstract approach in Mecánica (2005). With orchestral strings divided into 20 parts rather than the usual five, and an intricately interlocked system of motifs that move together like a vast set of gears, Vergara conjures a strangely beautiful, chugging, gun-metal-grey musical machine.

The two Peruvian works, Jorge Villavicencio Grossmann's Wayra (2011) and Antonio Gervasoni's Icarus (2003), have an attractive cinematic quality that provides colour and atmosphere, but they lack a cogent narrative structure. Una música escondida (2004), a three-movement nocturne for piano and strings by the Bolivian composer Agustín Fernández, is much more satisfying in its unpredictability and dramatic concision.

Even if these works are not equally compelling, the performances by Miguel Harth-Bedoya and the Norwegian Radio Orchestra are uniformly excellent. All in all, this disc is a tantalising sampler of contemporary Latin American orchestral music.

Andrew Farach-Colton

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# Stravinsky's The Firebird

Conductor Ludovic Morlot shares his insights about Stravinsky's ballet with Thomas May

Stravinsky's *The Firebird* is one of the most frequently performed of his works — yet aspects of this score remain paradoxically little-known. One reason for that is the somewhat dismissive attitude the composer himself later voiced, though he conducted his suites from the ballet far more often than any other of his works. In one of his conversations with Robert Craft, Stravinsky complained that he had never really liked Mikhail Fokine's original choreography for *The Firebird* (nor, for that matter, for *Petrushka*), adding that he preferred not only George Balanchine's version but the 1945 suite because 'the music of the complete ballet is too long and patchy in quality'.

The three separate concert suites Stravinsky published in 1911, 1919 and 1945 – each one longer than its predecessor, though in each of them the score of 1910 is substantially cut – were the result of this apparent dissatisfaction. But viewed from a perhaps more cynical, or merely practical, angle, these multiple versions were also the result of Stravinsky's cunning: a way to ensure that his most popular piece would earn him more royalties as international copyright laws changed.

'It's true that in some ways the music is uneven, but the entire ballet contains so many treasures of orchestration, it really is worthwhile', says Ludovic Morlot, whose account of the original 1910 score with the Seattle Symphony is just out. It completes their survey of the three canonical Russian ballets written before the First World War. In his very first season as the ensemble's Music Director, which began in 2011, Morlot revealed a strong affinity for this repertoire. All of their Stravinsky recordings were made from live performances in Seattle Symphony's home at Benaroya Hall.

I meet Morlot in an atmospheric Asian cafe near the concert hall. He instantly homes in on beloved details in Stravinsky's score with relish. 'I think the suites are overplayed. You often find them used as an easy way to fill out a concert programme, and so the shorter versions are the only music most people know of *The Firebird*. I've actually avoided the 1945 Suite altogether, because I don't think it captures the beauty of colours that characterises the original ballet.'

The opulent orchestral resources Stravinsky asked for in the 1910 score, with its quadruple winds and three harps – he later disparaged the scoring as 'wasteful' – are, for Morlot, essential to its particular late-Romantic flavour. That's another reason for the composer's ambivalence about his first full-



Ludovic Morlot has recorded The Firebird with the Seattle Symphony

length collaboration with Serge Diaghilev's Ballets Russes, whose success suddenly launched his international career when he was just 28. Influences from the musical language of the young composer's mentors and immediate models – Rimsky-Korsakov, Mussorgsky, Scriabin, Debussy – were later perceived as embarrassingly obvious. But for Morlot *The Firebird* documents a key moment in Stravinsky's evolution and in the transition to modernism. 'In a way he wants to put this behind him as he leaps on to his next ballets. I see this work as the last gasp of the Romantic taste for the exoticism of the faraway land. But it's also where Stravinsky is plying his trade as an orchestrator. It contains maybe the most charged writing that he ever did. After this he moves away from this heavy orchestration, where he was most influenced by Rimsky. For me the challenge is to approach it with transparency.'

And however derivative its vocabulary, *The Firebird* teems with innovative colours, the conductor points out. A favourite passage is the 'Carillon féerique', just after Prince Ivan has entered into the palace. The foreground orchestration 'is remarkable and novel – celesta, bells, piano, and three harps, as well as violas playing *sul ponticello* [close to the bridge], all of this *pianissimo* and in dialogue with the trumpets from offstage'.



#### The historical view

Igor Stravinsky Expositions and Developments (University of California Press: 1981)

'I was more proud of some of the orchestration than of the music itself... It was in some respects a fecund score for my own development in the next four years...'

Tamara Karsavina Recollections (from 1948) by the ballerina who created the title-role

'[Stravinsky's] whole body seemed to vibrate with his own rhythm [at rehearsal at the keyboard]; punctuating *staccatos* with his head, he made the pattern of his music forcibly clear to me.'

#### Pierre Boulez Orientations (Harvard UP: 1990)

I see in *Firebird* a kind of greed to take possession of already existing music and transmute it into an aggressively personal object...[We see] the passion with which the ferment of a creative idea impels a composer to embark on his first work.'

This is moreover an instance of 'the beauty of the score beyond the numbers we know so well. I find the transitions fascinating, and they can also be the most challenging moments. I try to get the players to create an organic feeling out of these moments, just as a chamber musician would do.'

Morlot leafs through his Eulenburg Miniature Score to show me some of the notes he has scribbled down: phrases to remind him of particular moments in the ballet scenario, a table charting what he calls the 'hyper-harmony', and a substantial table of errata. 'It's a collection of errors I've noticed over the years. This is one of those scores where you need to make a lot of corrections.' Morlot points to bar 30 (just after the beginning of 'Kastchei's Enchanted Garden'); indeed, my Schott rehearsal score contains a mistaken chord of E flat/G flat in the contrabassoons where they are clearly meant to follow the basses with an A flat/C flat. It's a minuscule example, likely imperceptible even to many a highly trained ear.

Yet such meticulous attention to detail underscores Morlot's emphasis on what he calls 'the careful voicing of inner details. Stravinsky is very specific about it here, whereas in *The Rite of Spring* he works much more with blocks. This happens on a very horizontal level in *The Firebird*, where there is an outstanding wealth of detail: sometimes so much so, that you have to make decisions about the foreground and background,

### 'I see this work as the last gasp of the Romantic taste for the exoticism of the faraway land' – Ludovic Morlot

and how quickly they change. For example, how to clarify whether the strings should play a real tremolo or a tremolo of 32nd notes with rhythmic figures on top of it.'

Such moment-by-moment decoding still leaves plenty of room for interpretation: by no means does this entail a straightforward, 'literal' reading. Take one of the score's most celebrated layerings of such detail, which occurs at the end of the Introduction (bar 14): high in their register, divided violins and cellos play muted natural harmonics as streams of otherworldly *glissandos* against a veil of sustained violas and basses. 'Like everybody else I know, I don't follow Stravinsky's *scordatura* instruction here [to have the violin and cello *glissando* on a retuned D], and, technically, you could say that's not being accurate, but it's a little utopian to have *scordatura* for just one bar. What I do is to use a little more time for that bar, and I ask the strings not to play together but at different individual speeds. By giving them a little more space in that bar, we can create the sound world we are after.'

For the large-scale view, Morlot imparts his idea of the 'single climax': 'The Firebird is very operatic in the sense that you must make sure you have only one climax. It's too early if you make it the "Infernal Dance", since you have nowhere to go then with the "Berceuse". For me the climax is the death of Kastchei [section 193]. Then you can open up to the final apotheosis.'

Overall, Morlot compares the holistic effect of Stravinsky's minute details of voicing, accent, and dynamics to pointillism. 'It's like Seurat placing all those dots at the right spot, so that you can step back and enjoy the whole painting in all its beauty without knowing the painter has built the composition that way.' **G** 

Ludovic Morlot's recording of The Firebird is reviewed on page 40



# Chamber



Richard Bratby is enthralled by Enescu's violin music:

In the Third Sonata, violinist Daniel Rowland plays with such fiery intensity that the music seems to shake' > REVIEW ON PAGE 50



Charlotte Gardner is swept away by Maurice Steger's virtuosity:

He takes showmanship to its apotheosis – the Hasse is an uber-presto pyrotechnical tour de force of coloratura' > REVIEW ON PAGE 58

#### Auerbach · Shostakovich

Auerbach Arcanum Shostakovich Preludes, Op 34 (transcr Auerbach) Kim Kashkashian va Lera Auerbach pf ECM New Series (© 481 2322 (58' • DDD)



The viola possesses a voice of inimitable mellowness and mysticism, and it is

also capable of the ironic gesture, as can be heard in this absorbing programme of music by Soviet-Russian composers Dmitry Shostakovich and Lera Auerbach. The eloquent American viola player Kim Kashkashian teams with Auerbach, who is also a superlative pianist, in Auerbach's *Arcanum* and her transcription of Shostakovich's 24 Preludes, Op 34.

Few works could be more different in mood and spirit. The early Shostakovich collection, originally for solo piano but appropriated by other instruments and ensembles, comprises character miniatures ranging from the playful and lyrical to the sardonic and whimsical. They are short – some less than a minute – and pack a world of fascinating ideas into compact spaces. (On the disc itself, the information cites the wrong Shostakovich score, the Preludes and Fugues, Op 87.)

The four movements of *Arcanum* constitute a series of haunted ruminations on death. In an interview printed in the booklet, Auerbach says the piece explores a 'constant tension between something inescapable that is beyond our control and our attempts to find meaning or perhaps find freedom from those frames that we are placed within'. Another hint about the music's essence lies in the title, which means 'mysterious knowledge'.

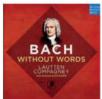
Nothing is mysterious about the beauty and depth these musicians bring to both works. In seamless collaborations, viola player and pianist contribute nuanced and vital artistry that heightens the varied atmospheres in the Shostakovich and conveys the quiet anguish pervading the  $Auerbach.\ \mbox{\bf Donald Rosenberg}$ 

#### JS Bach

'Bach Without Words'

Instrumental movements and arrangements from Cantatas Nos 4, 17, 20, 26, 40, 42, 62, 68, 76, 97, 105, 120, 127, 131, 133, 140, 146, 150, 163, 166, 191 and 202

#### **Lautten Compagney**



On the face of it, this is turkey-carving or eggnog-making Bach: an album of

instrumental contrafacta, if that isn't a contradiction in terms, in which sacred cantata arias and choruses have been lent a secular purpose, eminently friendly to radio play, through discreet transpositions, snipping of *da capo* sections and assignment of vocal lines to soloists in a concerto grosso ensemble of the size Bach himself directed at Zimmermann's coffee house in Leipzig.

No justification is required for such a happy enterprise, though one can be found in the composer's own readiness to make such arrangements when it suited him. Inspection of the booklet reveals a loftier purpose on the part of the arrangers, who have gathered the movements into three cantata-concertos, following a theological scheme of comparably obscure content to Nikolaus Harnoncourt's late requisitioning of Mozart's last three symphonies as an instrumental oratorio.

What matters is that it works, and not least thanks to the compact energy and unassuming verve of Lautten Compagney. This Berlin-based early music group, now over 30 years old, has a record of uncommon juxtapositions and imaginative responses not always appreciated beyond the Continent: if you haven't encountered it, do try 'Timeless', their 2010 album of Merula canzons and 'period' Philip Glass.

New slants on old favourites include 'Die Seele ruht' from Cantata No 127, one of Bach's heart-stopping 'death clock' arias; the ebullient affirmation of lifeforce which launches No 133, Ich freue mich in dir; and, perhaps inevitably, the 'Wachet auf' chorale-aria to close the album. Don't miss some hard-working banter between winds in the 'hell' aria of Cantata No 40. which is taken at a more infernal canter than any vocal bass could comfortably encompass; or the grave dialogue which reclaims the origin of the first chorus in No 146 as the slow movement of the famous D minor Keyboard Concerto. It sounds as though everyone concerned had tremendous fun. Peter Quantrill

#### **Beethoven**

'Complete Sonatas & Variations for Cello & Piano' **Ralph Kirshbaum** *vc* **Shai Wosner** *pf*Onyx (2) ONYX4178 (134' • DDD)



What better way to celebrate an important birthday than with the Beethoven cello

sonatas? It's hard to believe that Ralph Kirshbaum is 70 and, certainly in the company of Shai Wosner, these sonatas – recorded last year at London's Wigmore Hall – have an infectious exuberance.

Highlights are many: the opening movement of Op 102 No 1, for instance, which is unerringly paced and nicely balances the muscular and the skittish, and Kirshbaum never less than beautiful in the high-lying writing. Naturalness is a key feature of these readings – a tribute to Kirshbaum's long relationship with the pieces. Just sample the way in which the introductory *Adagio sostenuto* of the First Sonata unfurls before your ears, leading into a playful account of the *Allegro*. They relish equally the bustling rondo that forms the second and final movement.

The minor-key starkness of the Second Sonata is underlined by the fact that they place it after the 'Ein Mädchen oder

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Viola player Kim Kashkashian teams up with pianist and composer Lera Auerbach

Weibchen' Variations. This is one of the most compelling things in the set, the slow opening given with due depth of feeling and dramatic light and shade. The following *Allegro* has an understated strength that is very effective. Phillips and Guy are notably quicker here, as they are in the finale of this sonata, while Queyras and Melnikov delight in the subversive, combined with a huge range of colours not quite matched in this new set.

I'm slightly less convinced by Kirshbaum and Wosner in the Third Sonata: few can match the questing spirit of Isserlis and Levin at the start. And their Scherzo is just a little on the deliberate side. But it is in the *Adagio cantabile* that I have most reservations – it simply sounds too ponderous, especially compared to Queyras.

The great slow movement of the final sonata, on the other hand, contains much beautiful playing from Kirshbaum, with Wosner the most empathetic of fellow travellers. The way they link from this movement to the fugal finale, whose opening upward scales are imbued not just with perkiness but elegance too, is another highlight. Of the three variation sets, 'Bei Männern' works particularly well.

As a whole, this is a more 'traditional' approach to the sonatas than the comparisons listed below, but if subversion and reinvention are not top priorities, it's well worth exploring. Harriet Smith Selected comparisons:

Isserlis, Levin (2/14) (HYPE) CDA67981/2 Queyras, Melnikov (11/14) (HARM) HMC90 2183/4 Phillips, Guy (1/16) (EVID) EVCD015

#### Crane

Events. John White in Berlin. Old Life Was Rubbish. Riis. Sound of Horse Asamisimasa

Hubro (Ē) HUBROCD2582; (Ē) ② ● HUBROLP3582 (55' • DDD)



These five scores by the British composer Laurence Crane were written over a period

of 13 years, between 1996 and 2009, but are unified by a noticeable consistency of mood, texture and technique, and Crane's itch to fill the existentialist void. *Sound of Horse*, the most recent work, was composed specifically for the Norwegian new music ensemble Asamisimasa, whose distinctive instrumental line-up – clarinet, cello,

percussion, soprano voice with acoustic and/or electric guitar and keyboards – happens to chime nicely with his own sensibility for timbre. The ensemble have opted to perform the open-scored *Old Life Was Rubbish* (1998) on electric guitar, bass clarinet and piano; but such is the synergy between composer and musicians that each piece sounds tailor-made for the ensemble.

British culture has always taken a particular angle on existentialist woe think Ivor Cutler obsessing about wearing his elbows out, or the tedium of Tony Hancock's Sunday afternoon – a vein that Crane's work has tapped into and managed to make coexist with notions of time informed by Cage and Feldman (which, I guess, would also ally his work to Beckett). Events finds Crane at his most whimsical, setting a sequence of lists culled from the February 7, 1997 edition of the Guardian newspaper, while Riis (1996) and John White in Berlin (2003) tease our sense of right and wrong by sounding familiar tonal patterns that are made to perform against type.

Events elevates everyday minutiae to a position of importance and dares us to mock, Morton Feldman meets John Shuttleworth; John White in Berlin has an attractive surface that belies subtle hints of

unease and tenebrosity, while Crane's ear for tonal organisation is always impeccable. His settings from *The Guardian*'s birthday column, weather pages and foreign exchange-rate listings - which deal up lines like 'Gareth Hunt, actor, 54', 'Liverpool, sunny, 8' and the positively Brexotic 'one pound: 264 escudos' - construct a counterpoint of incongruity. Compulsively neat, poker-faced chorales and scalic patterns – art, most definitely – frame the merely functional. John White in Berlin is underscored by percussion drones, a stasis from which Crane defines unlikely specifics as minor-toned harmony reminiscent of Feldman is confronted by neon-light major triads - another incongruous counterpoint, played out as pure sound. Philip Clark

#### **Enescu**

Violin Sonatas - No 2, Op 6; No 3, 'dans le caractère populaire roumain', Op 25. Impressions d'enfance, Op 28

Daniel Rowland VII Natacha Kudritskaya pf Champs Hill © CHRCD120 (74' • DDD)



The piano ripples over the opening phrase of the Third Sonata, the violin gives a yearning,

wavering cry and immediately we're in Enescu's world – and it's just a question of how fully and deeply these performers can inhabit it. So be in no doubt, there is some stellar playing on this disc. Daniel Rowland has a powerful, glamorous tone, gleaming at the top and throaty and rugged down at the bottom, and Natacha Kudritskaya matches him every bar of the way for passion, fantasy and precision.

They bring off the first movement of the Second Sonata in a single lyrical sweep. Kudritskaya really shines here; listen to the chiming delicacy of her solo episode from around 4'15" in the second movement. Rowland's commitment, too, is total: in the mercurial, folk-dance flare-ups of the Third Sonata he plays with such fiery intensity that the music seems to shake. Even in the stratospheric, Messiaen-like birdsong imitations of the *Impressions d'enfance*, Rowland's focus is absolute.

And yet I was left with a slight feeling that somehow the pair weren't so much surrendering to the Romanian folk spirit in this music as summoning it up by sheer force of will – certainly when compared to the spontaneity and animal instinct of, say, Sherban Lupu. But to be fair, the only serious caveat is that the individual sections of the *Impressions* aren't listed or given separate tracks. These are engrossing

performances of some of the 20th century's most original and compelling violin music. **Richard Bratby** 

#### **Glass**

Music for the Crucible

Miranda Cuckson vn Jeffrey Zeigler vc

Orange Mountain © OMMO112 (41' • DDD)



Glass has long maintained that he is a theatre composer rather than a

minimalist, and has drawn inspiration from the medium over a period of 50 years – from early experiences of seeing experimental theatre productions to being in-house composer for the avant-garde company Mabou Mines, which he co-founded in 1970. However, apart from a few cues from Music for Voices, Dressed Like an Egg or his String Quartet No 2 (the latter originally composed for Mabou Mines' production of Samuel Beckett's Company), very little of Glass's theatre music has actually been released on disc. This recording of music composed for the 2016 Broadway production of Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* partly redresses the imbalance.

Miller's chilling account of the 1692 Salem witch-hunt, which dramatises the breakdown of society, unleashing the destructive power of mob mentality, continues to resonate with audiences. One can understand why director Scott Rudin – whose cinematic collaborations with the composer have included *The Truman Show* and *The Hours* – opted for Glass's distinctive brand of theatre music, with its dark, obsessive ostinatos, disquieting harmonic shifts and downwards-moving melodic shapes.

However, without any verbal or visual aids, it's difficult to piece together the parts that make up this musical jigsaw. Written for solo violin and cello, which adds an unsettling intimacy to the stark atmosphere of gloominess, the opening two cues outline the score's main themes and establish from the very beginning the sense of uncertainty and insecurity. Cue 6 is more intense and agitated, while cues 7A and 7B for solo cello tap into the psychology of fear, loneliness and isolation that grips the victims of the witch-hunt. Cues 10, 12 and 11A form the work's central spine. Cue 12 bursts into a violent frenzy but the music soon becomes spare, stripped down and hollowed out. The opening theme returns, resigned and drained of expression, as if going through

the motions of living out its final moments. Sadly, not a week goes by without there being a *Crucible* scenario taking place somewhere in the world. The music's uncertain ending suggests that, as is the case with Glass's music, history continues to repeat itself. **Pwyll ap Siôn** 

#### **Goldberg**

'Beyond the Variations' Sonatas - DürG10; DürG11; DürG12; DürG13; DürG14 **Rebel / Jörg-Michael Schwarz** *vn* Bridge (F) BRIDGE9478 (60' • DDD)



Yes, it's that Goldberg, he of the Variations: the same one whose service

as court musician to insomniac Count Keyserlingk included incessant night shifts playing Bach's newly minted keyboard set. Whatever the veracity of this posthumously related tale, Johann Gottlieb Goldberg is 'the Variations' in no meaningful sense. These chamber pieces of a young possible-pupil of Bach are certainly skilful and occasionally quixotic, but essentially generic examples of mid-18th-century practice.

Most unusual is Goldberg's instinct for harmonic theatricality; the G minor Sonata even hints at something Zelenkalike, Bohemian flights checked only by a decidedly didactic contrapuntal conscience, and curiously unadventurous instrumental writing. The more one listens, the more one hears the slightly disorientating and dogmatically eccentric world of WF Bach.

The performances from Rebel under Jörg-Michael Schwarz are nothing if not committed (Goldberg's taut *allegros* are certainly intense affairs), with the violins quickly settling as natural sparring partners, and always solidly underpinned by the fleet-of-foot continuo. Yet it's all pretty unyielding in uniformity of articulation and dynamic. High positions tend towards sharpness and, alongside an insistent exaggeration of conceits from movement to movement, this can make for wearing listening.

Mollifying contrasts – which the dour A minor Sonata cries out for – are simply not part of Rebel's armoury; the finest period players would seek out poetic sensibility from the obsessive rigour and exhibitionism of a composer described contemporaneously (and not surprisingly on this hearing) as 'melancholic and stubborn'. Nevertheless, for all its



 $Daniel\ Rowland\ and\ Natacha\ Kudritskaya\ play\ Enescu-`some\ of\ the\ 20th\ century\ 's\ most\ original\ and\ compelling\ violin\ music'$ 

earnestness, Rebel have successfully extended our awareness of a household name to a musician with his own legacy, but one who never made the age of 30. Jonathan Freeman-Attwood

#### Haydn

String Quartets - Op 54; Op 55

The London Haydn Quartet

Hyperion ® ② CDA68160 (153' • DDD)



Is there a greater musical treat than sitting down to listen to a new set of Haydn

quartets (well, apart from actually playing them)? The London Haydn Quartet's period-instrument cycle has reached Opp 54 and 55, and with them, some of the richest and most fantastic of the many treasures that await those who venture off the beaten path of Haydn's nicknamed and late works.

The London Haydn Quartet engage both head and heart from the very first bar. Take, for example, their sharply characterised opening flourish in Op 54 No 2. It's part of a larger strategy. Knowing that the gypsy *Adagio* is something special, they play the opening chorale with a big, throaty vibrato – while violinist Catherine Manson wrings aching portamentos out of her swirling phrases. Yet it's all, somehow, kept within a logical rhythmic framework – making Haydn's slow finale feel like the culmination of a single imaginative vision.

Once again, the LHQ find all this spirit while remaining faithful to the letter of the score (they play from a 1789 edition), and with all repeats observed you get plenty of Haydn for your money. In Hyperion's bright recorded sound the group's transparent, mostly vibrato-free tone may initially feel chilly; but bear with it. It pays dividends in Op 54 No 3, where Haydn builds his textures around the middle voices: Manson seems to glint and glitter over the top. And again, in the first movement of Op 55 No 2, where the group applies just the right amount of sugar to Haydn's F minor pill.

Not that these players are unduly fixated on form. There are any number of wayside delights, from the LHQ's deadpan final pay-off in Op 54 No 1 to their spacious phrasing in Op 55 No 3's *Adagio*. In short, these performances offer more with each listening. Booklet-notes by Richard

Wigmore complete a very handsome package. Richard Bratby

#### Mondonville

Six Trio Sonatas, Op 2

Ensemble Diderot

Audax (© ADX13707 (67' • DDD)



I've always rather liked the portrait of Jean-Joseph Cassanéa de Mondonville. With

his bonny face, playful smile and tidy steelcoloured wig with matching five o'clock shadow, he looks like a man who would make good company. Today this prominent violinist and composer from mid-18thcentury Paris is best remembered for being one of the last exponents of the grand motet and one of the first of the accompanied keyboard sonata, a genre which he put on the map with his Op 3 of 1734. That set has been recorded before, including the pimped-up version of them published as Sonates en Simphonies. The cover of this disc says that it is the 'world premiere recording' of his Op 2 Trio Sonatas of 1734, a claim that seems entirely believable.

It is not just Mondonville's portrait that suggests companionability. Like Leclair, he added French manners to the Corellian four-movement sonata format, though his habit of making third movements rather sweet little airs instead of the more traditional harmonic wring-out suggests that he did not really want to let things get too serious. There are some awkward corners, especially in the fugues, but in general the music is pleasant enough. Also shared with Leclair, however, is Mondonville's taste for stretching the violinists' technique, double-stopping being particularly prominent.

Ensemble Diderot made their recording at Royaumont Abbey in a somewhat hollow acoustic which can be both unforgiving towards intonation and harmful to mellifluousness, especially when there are double-stops to battle with. Two violins are used for Sonatas Nos 1, 2, 4 and 6, but in Nos 3 and 5, where the second part avoids double-stops, a flute takes it over, and it is noticeable how its more liquid sound can help smooth things over. But if in some ways this is not always the most refined of products, there is nimble expertise and good spirit here nevertheless. Lindsay Kemp

#### **Mozart** · Poulenc

**Mozart** Violin Sonatas – No 18, K301; No 21, K304; No 26, K378 **Poulenc** Violin Sonata **Esther Hoppe** *vn* **Alasdair Beatson** pf Claves **(E)** 50-1701 (67' • DDD)



Poulenc wasn't too sure about violin sonatas: 'The prima donna violin over

arpeggiated piano makes me want to vomit', he remarked. Presumably he'd have had no problem with the Mozart sonatas, K301 and 304, that open this disc by Esther Hoppe and Alasdair Beatson. These are sonatas for piano with violin accompaniment, rather than the other way round, and this pair make that clear from the outset, with Beatson's bass line striding emphatically forward even as Hoppe plays her winsome opening melody.

That sets the tone for large-scale performances – very definitely public rather than private, with Claves' spacious studio acoustic allowing plenty of room for big gestures. The architecture of the music comes through strongly, and Leopold Mozart would have approved of Hoppe's selective use of vibrato. She's an impulsive player, though, and Beatson sounds at times as if he's restraining himself. If you

prefer more intimacy in this sort of music, you may find both of them a little too eager to switch to full beam.

They sound more at ease in K378 – perhaps a reflection of the greater sophistication of Mozart's writing, although Hoppe still has a rather aggressive way of landing on cadences. No reservations, however, apply to their account of the Poulenc – tense, dramatic and imaginative, with Beatson piling up huge, gothic crags of tone at the tragic climaxes and Hoppe glinting and whispering in the brooding central elegy for Lorca. Like everything on this enjoyable but idiosyncratic disc, it's certainly not short of character.

### Prokofiev

Violin Sonata No 1, Op 80. Five Melodies, Op 35*b*. Five Pieces from Cinderella. Suite from Romeo and Juliet **Lisa Oshima** *vn* **Stefan Stroissnig** *pf* Quartz **(E)** QTZ2119 (70' • DDD)



The Japanese violinist Lisa Oshima has by no means gone for the easier option here,

choosing, instead of Prokofiev's more lyrical D major Violin Sonata, the grimmer, tougher, more brooding one in F minor. On a 2014 Hyperion release, Alina Ibragimova and Steven Osborne combine both sonatas (together with the *Five Melodies*), and in the First Sonata give a performance of terrific and terrifying intensity. But with Oshima's different choices as couplings, this new disc more than holds its own.

She is matched by her pianist Stefan Stroissnig in bringing an aura of bleak apprehension to the chill opening bars, reinforced later on in the movement by her ghostly scales up and down the fingerboard like a gust of malevolent breeze. This is a sonata that Prokofiev tussled with for many years until its completion in 1946, its bitterness, dissonance and hard-won lyrical force reflecting the horrors, harshness and hardships of war and maybe even of Stalin's Russia, though ironically it won the Stalin Prize in 1947. Oshima and Stroissnig certainly seem to have a clear and disturbing picture of the sonata's emotional implications, which are incorporated into an interpretation of impressive dynamic thrust, unnerving harmonic and rhythmic twists and turns, and an eerie sense of shadows, foreboding and, in the finale, violent anguish.

Following this with the tender, reflective first miniature in the set of *Five Melodies* was a shrewd idea, releasing the sonata's tension and introducing the ear to the sweetness and fullness that Oshima can also conjure from her violin, though passion, too, aptly erupts at the start of the third piece. The *Cinderella* extracts (arranged by Mikhail Fichtenholz) and the *Romeo and Juliet* Suite (arranged by Lidia Baich and Matthias Fletzberger) find both Oshima and Stroissnig finely attuned to atmosphere and to the music's dramatic connotations. **Geoffrey Norris** 

Sonata, Melodies – selected comparison: Ibragimova, Osborne (8/14) (HYPE) CDA67514

## Prokofiev · Rachmaninov · Scriabin

Prokofiev Cello Sonata, Op 119. Cinderella, Op 97*bis* – Adagio Rachmaninov Cello Sonata, Op 19. Vocalise, Op 34 No 14 Scriabin Romance Johannes Moser *vc* Andrei Korobeinikov *pf*Pentatone (F) PTC5186 594 (72' • DDD/DSD)



Johannes Moser is palpably a gifted cellist, lending his warm tone to two

very different Russian sonatas. I was momentarily thrown by the opening of the Prokofiev Sonata, which is slightly sour, tuning-wise, and this is occasionally an issue elsewhere. But there is also much to applaud. The mock-martial demeanour of the second movement, with its sonorous pizzicatos, is vividly wrought by Moser and Korobeinikov more subversive than Müller-Schott and Piemontesi – and they relish the contrast between this and the languorous bowed theme. If it is the latter duo who find more light and shade in the opening Andante grave, in the finale, by contrast, I very much like infectious busyness of this new set; by comparison Müller-Schott and Piemontesi are perhaps a little too lithe and streamlined.

Moser and Korobeinikov's Rachmaninov Sonata has a keen sense of drama and line that never gets obscured despite the piece's manifold technical challenges. They have to contend with some big-name comparisons, however, not least the recent Weilerstein and Barnatan that so impressed my colleague Hannah Nepil. For white-hot reactivity these two are hard to beat, and Moser doesn't quite scale the same emotional heights. Nor does Korobeinikov boast the range of colours that Hough finds for Isserlis in the songful *Andante*. And while the finale of this new set has both



 $\hbox{`Nimble expertise and good spirit': Ensemble Diderot play Mondonville}\\$ 

impetus and passion, again Weilerstein and Barnatan are more febrile still.

By way of extras, we get from Moser and Korobeinikov a beautifully fresh-sounding Rachmaninov *Vocalise* (almost as moving as Weilerstein), an ardent account of the *Adagio* from Prokofiev's *Cinderella* and two minutes of pure pleasure in their borrowing of Scriabin's teenage *Romance*, originally for horn and piano. A nicely recorded balance too.

#### **Harriet Smith**

Prokofiev – selected comparison:
Müller-Schott, Piemontesi (ORFE) C872151A
Rachmaninov – selected comparisons:
Isserlis, Hough (7/03) (HYPE) CDA67376
Weilerstein, Barnatan (11/15) (DECC) 478 8416DH

#### Rimsky-Korsakov · Taneyev

Rimsky-Korsakov Piano Trio Taneyev Piano Trio, Op 22 Leonore Piano Trio Hyperion © CDA68159 (78' • DDD)



Although Borodin and Tchaikovsky wrote string quartets and, in Tchaikovsky's case, a piano trio that have maintained their rightful place in the repertoire, it was Sergey Taneyev who applied himself to the realms of chamber music with particular industry in the context of late-19th- and early-20th-century Russia. With the upsurge of interest in Taneyev's music in recent years, much of it, including the D major Trio, has already been recorded, as too, rather more surprisingly, has Rimsky-Korsakov's C minor Trio. But this new coupling of the two works benefits considerably from the compelling way in which the Leonore Piano Trio plays them.

Taneyev, more astute than Tchaikovsky was in finding a balance between the piano and the two string instruments, is also far more resourceful in tonal colouring, in contrapuntal knitting and pitting of parts and in the general sense of creative momentum and coherence. These are qualities that the Leonore harness to terrific effect, bringing to the fore the fact that Taneyev, far from being mired in the pedantry for which he was maligned before his music became more generally known, had a passionate, romantic impulse, strong ideas and a true lyrical gift that is as individual as it is affecting and discerningly deployed.

Rimsky-Korsakov's Trio, completed by his son-in-law Maximilian Steinberg, does not probe as deeply as Taneyev's. But the sensitive way in which the Leonore point up its attractions and gird up the music's latent vitality more than justifies its inclusion here. Geoffrey Norris

### Röntgen

'String Trios, Vol 4'
String Trios - No 13; No 14; No 15; No 16
Lendvai String Trio
Champs Hill © CHRCD122 (72' • DDD)



This review wrote itself. All the marvellous traits I noted in Vols 1-3

(2/14, 11/14, 3/16) apply here: the 'freshness of melodic and thematic invention' with its 'inexhaustible fecundity of melody', 'sheer *joie de vivre*' and 'compositional craftsmanship', alongside 'the impeccable musicianship [of] the wonderful Lendvai Trio', their 'infectious enthusiasm consistently communicated' which 'compels attention'.

No 13, a minor masterpiece of poise and grace, is the last of three trios Röntgen wrote in Bilthoven in early 1925. Nos 14-16 were produced singly (unlike their predecessors, which tended to be written in groups). No 14 dates from February 1928, following a trip to America. The main theme of the lovely Andantino con tenerezza has a touch of the Spiritual about it and the Trio as a whole, despite the minor home key, is light and relaxed. So is No 15, completed in August 1929 during a car tour of northern Italy with his eldest son, Engelbert, and his daughter-in-law. Known to the family as the 'Car Trio', it records his impressions of this family holiday, complete with evocation of the car's horn and a Finale automobilistico. What turned out to be the final Trio was written in three days in May 1930. Once more, the music is full of charm, a real dialogue for the three players.

The performances are superbly committed and the recording, made in the Champs Hill Music Room in June 2015, is superbly balanced, the players in a beautifully natural perspective. Having revisited the earlier volumes in preparation for this new disc, I think this might just be the best of the series. **Guy Rickards** 

#### Saariaho

'Chamber Music for Strings, Vol 2'
Die Aussicht<sup>a</sup>. Aure. Changing Light<sup>a</sup>.
...de la terre<sup>b</sup>. Du gick, flög<sup>a</sup>. Fleurs de neige. Nocturne. Terra memoria

<sup>a</sup>Pia Freund sop <sup>b</sup>Marko Myöhänen elecs Meta4
Ondine © ODE1242-2 (60' • DDD • T/t)



My colleague Andrew Mellor's smart little analysis of the cul-desac into which Kaija

Saariaho has driven her work during the latter part of her career – in his review of Saariaho's chamber works with flute (Ondine, 12/15) – can't really be bettered. 'Milking her aesthetic stasis for all its worth', AM wrote, and listening to this second instalment of small-scale chamber pieces with two larger works – ...de la terre (1991) for violin and electronics and Terra memoria for string quartet (2006) – the conclusion that Saariaho has whittled her vocabulary down to a purée of interchangeable effects, designed to function convincingly no matter what the harmonic context, is difficult to avoid.

Certainly the days of conceptually bold statements packed with harmonic intrigue like *Verblendungen* (1984) and *Lichtbogen* (1986) feel a long way in her past, and

for reasons that the opening piece, the miniature for string quartet Fleurs de neige (1998), make instantly clear. The Finnish quartet Meta4 play with keyhole clarity and purpose, but the music itself feels phobic about nailing anything meaningful to any meaningful mast. Tremolos and harmonic glissandos glance secretively above the surface before scuttling back to safety. Sustained notes crescendo with grandiose ceremony into thin air. And even when, at long last, the meat of Saariaho's argument gathers impetus with soulful melodic musings over a rocking bass, the action rubs itself out, freezing suddenly into generalised atmospherics.

All the pieces here display that same tendency of implying gravitas by staging atmosphere rather than manipulating musical material. *Die Aussicht* (1996) descends into generic operatic writing for soprano voice, while ...de la terre plunders every hackneyed cliché of electronica in the book, including wiring super-loud string pizzicatos into the mains where they shatter into slow-motion reverb – a done-to-death effect typical of Nordic techno.

Philip Clark

#### **Schubert**



String Quartets - No 12, 'Quartettsatz', D703; No 15, D887

#### **Doric Quartet**

Chandos (F) CHAN10931 (62' • DDD)



Here we have a followup to the Doric's acclaimed 2012 disc pairing the *Rosamunde* 

and Death and the Maiden, this time with the group's revised line-up. Even in a work as well known as the Quartettsatz they lend character through elasticity of phrasing, which nicely counterbalances the piece's inherent energy; while at moments such as the ffz accents near the beginning they avoid sounding as if they're on a shooting range. As a whole, theirs is a more unearthly reading than the fine account from the Takács, the Doric palpably enjoying the myriad possibilities of pianissimo.

But the main event is the G major Quartet. And very impressive it is too, spacious without ever sounding ponderous. This is in part down to their minute attention to detail. Just sample the opening, with its unerringly balanced chords and almost vibrato-free imitative phrases. They have less forward thrust than the Busch here but are no less convincing, leading us unerringly through the shifting vistas of the *Allegro molto moderato*.

In the slow movement, they eschew the beauty that some find in the first theme, which makes the near hysteria of the second idea sound more inevitable. Perhaps too inevitable: to my ears the Belcea's juxtaposition of gently sad nostalgia and near brutality is quite overwhelming, compared to which the Artemis's finely wrought reading is just a tad saner.

The Doric's Scherzo is brilliantly febrile and their precision in terms of dramatic juxtapositions of dynamics quite jaw-dropping; the yearning Trio is just sweet enough but not too much so. And they bring alive the finale's jarring contrasts. Tempo-wise, this is not as driven as some accounts, notably the Belcea, who imbue the movement with a kind of yelping intensity, contrasting with the Busch, who still manage to find shards of charm in among the terrifying chase. But the Doric build up their own kind of relentlessness, one that becomes more potent on repeated hearings.

Superb notes from Bayan Northcott, too, though there's a strange picture within the booklet in which the quartet look as if they're embarking on a spot of rewiring. Maybe quartet-playing doesn't pay these days... Harriet Smith

Quartet, D887 – selected comparisons: Busch Qt (5/89) (EMI) 769795-2 Belcea Qt (12/09) (EMI) 967025-2 Artemis Qt (9/12) (VIRG) 602512-2 Quartettsatz, D703 – selected comparisons: Takács Qt (12/12) (HYPE) CDA67864

#### **C Simpson**



The Four Seasons

#### Sirius Viols

Deutsche Harmonia Mundi © 88875 19098-2 (74' • DDD)



Christopher Simpson's *The Four Seasons* is an unusual thing. Each season lasts about

15-20 minutes and consists of a Fancy (Fantasy), an Ayre and a Galliard liberally laced with the kind of running ornamentation for which the composer of *The Division-Violist* is best remembered. They are scored for one treble instrument, two bass viols and continuo, and are as rich, robust and English as a Cox's orange pippin. How they connect with their supposed subject is harder to sense; Simpson left us no clues, and it could well be that these are the kind of 'descriptive' pieces in which the players are left to supply the appropriate mood out of their own free imaginations.

Sirius Viols have no problem

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The Doric Quartet lend character to Schubert through their elasticity of phrasing

with that – a glance at Hille Perl's idiosyncratic booklet-notes is proof and so there is no time in this recording when you feel they are just playing the notes and hoping something will come of them. Instead they give this long-limbed music a coursing ebb and flow that never flattens, and a sense of purely musical drama that holds the listener in thrall. What is more, their sound is gorgeous: if you ever thought that three viols could only sound weedy, or that music for them could only noodle along in the background, here is concrete evidence to the contrary. In Sirius's hands it compels attention.

Though I have heard a violin play the top part, it is played here by a treble viol, with each of the three Sirius players having a different season to try it out. If the differences between them are slight ones, more noticeable is the way the continuo colourings change as the cycle goes on, giving subtle shape to the year (the jangly sound of cittern and bandora tremoloing in Spring is certainly a new one to me). Frankly, this beautiful disc is as inspiriting as a woodland walk in autumn. Lindsay Kemp

#### **Augustin Hadelich**

Franck Violin Sonata
Kurtág Tre Pezzi, Op 14e
Previn Tango Song and Dance
Schumann Violin Sonata No 1, Op 105
Augustin Hadelich Vn
Joyce Yang pf



Avie (F) AV2347 (67' • DDD)

It was a sensible choice for Augustin Hadelich and Joyce Yang to put

André Previn's *Tango Song and Dance* first on this engaging recital disc. The imaginative programme could be seen to become more weighty as it advances but their thoughtful performance of the Previn establishes their identity as a duo of insight from the outset. In playing down the work's American popular references and concentrating attention on the sections of greater harmonic and melodic complexity, they give an impression of greater intricacy than Anne-Sophie Mutter and Lambert Orkis's indulgent version, without

losing any of its very obvious melodic beauty (particularly in 'Song').

By contrast, however, their approach to the Schumann sonata - seen for generations as little more than a dying ramble of musical loose-ends – plays down its complexities, which in any case tread a fine line between compositional skill and incoherence, and concentrate on the more general high-Romantic characteristics that identify Schumann's style. Such pragmatism is evident throughout the disc, borne directly out of the reciprocity that defines Hadelich and Yang's partnership. In Kurtág's Tre Pezzi the balance shifts more to the piano, and Yang brings out as much beauty in it as Hadelich does in the Previn – particularly so in the first piece, 'Öd und traurig'.

It is in the Franck, though, that all these elements come together to greatest effect. It is a rare recording that maintains the sort of precision that allows it to stand up to repeated listening while at the same time fostering an illusion of spontaneity, but this is one.

#### **Caroline Gill**

Previn – selected comparison: Mutter, Orkis (6/03) (DG) 471 500-2GH



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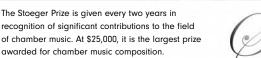


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Clarinetist Carl Rosman with composer Rebecca Saunders, whose Caerulean is an extended exploration into trilled multiphonics

#### 'L'Ange & le Diable'

Forqueray Suite No 5 (excs) Leclair Sonata, Op 9 No 8 Locatelli Sonata, Op 6 No 12 Tartini Sonata, 'The Devil's Trill', BG5 Chouchane Siranossian vn Jos van Immerseel hpd



This disc's title comes from the fact that three of its virtuosocomposers were

compared in their day either to an angel (Leclair) or to a devil (Locatelli and Forqueray), while the fourth (Tartini) attributed the extreme difficulty of his most famous composition to diabolical inspiration visited on him in a dream. Fiendishness as a performer does not always translate to composition - Tartini's music is actually often among the most angelic of the 18th century - but the fireworks of Locatelli's solo capriccios (one of which, crawling all over the strings and ascending to dog-bothering pitch heights, ends the sonata included here) certainly make his classification understandable, while the unfailing

elegance that survives the challenging double-stops of Leclair's sonatas is enough to make for a very pleasant visitation indeed.

If I had to categorise Chouchane Siranossian in similar terms, I would plump for angelic for the simple beauty of her playing, which belies the toughness of the music by being well-tuned and sweetly turned at every step, with a richly earpleasing sound and little sign of technical struggle. If the devil really does lurk among those Tartini trills, there doesn't seem much chance of him knocking her off her stride. Her musicianship is likewise faultless, unconcerned with tricks and quirks but rather on letting her violin do the speaking. This is top-class Baroque violin-playing, reminiscent of another virtuoso made for this repertoire, Giuliano Carmignola.

The non-violinist among these composers is Antoine Forqueray, whose robust viola da gamba compositions are represented by four of the solo harpsichord transcriptions published by his son. Jos van Immerseel is better known as a fortepianist, but here escapes from his unfussy continuo role to produce performances of deep tone and firm momentum. The excellent

recorded sound adds both body and bloom to this gem of a disc. Lindsay Kemp

#### 'Caerulean'

Aperghis Damespiel Barrett Flechtwerka Cassidy The wreck of former boundaries Kagel Elegie. Pieza Morishita Skin, Gelatine, Soot Saunders Caerulean

Carl Rosman c/s aMark Knoop pf Huddersfield Contemporary Records © HCR12CD (75' • DDD)



One of the most renowned clarinetists on the new music scene, Carl Rosman

has worked closely with each of the composers represented here, in some cases over multiple projects. The extent of the collaboration varies from work to work, as he explains in an illuminating bookletnote, but the sense of pieces written to fit him like a glove pervades the whole. One is particularly struck by his command of breath, whether taken in audible gulps and gasps or inaudibly through circular breathing. It gives these performances a raw edge, even when the music hovers at

the boundary of immobility. Another intriguing feature of this recital is the absence of 10-minute works, which are quite common in solo programmes of this sort: the pieces by Aaron Cassidy and Georges Aperghis are rather shorter, those by Richard Barrett, Rebecca Saunders and Chikako Morishita about twice that length, and the two by Kagel are miniatures.

It is particularly intriguing to compare Morishita's five-movement Skin, Gelatine, Soot with Saunders's and Barrett's singlemovement forms. The recurrence of repeated patterns, the revisiting of gestural materials across changing timeframes, leads to a very different sense of time passing from Saunders's Caerulean, an extended exploration into trilled multiphonics, in which the tension between stasis and detail is (purposely) never fully resolved. The haunting twonote multiphonics that end the piece (evident favourites of Rosman) do so again in Barrett's Flechtwerk and Cassidy's The wreck of former boundaries, although the wailing agitation that precedes them in the Cassidy entirely changes how they are heard, as Rosman himself remarks. Perhaps the most impressive performance on the disc is the duo with pianist Mark Knoop in Barrett's Flecthtwerk - impressive because the episodes of rhythmic and timbral coincidence, and the deviations from them, are equally assured and motivated. The piece's many playful passages had me smiling, but the clarinet cadenza near the end neatly sums up Rosman's energy and sheer physicality. In this repertory, virtuosity can almost be taken for granted, but Rosman - and the composers too – gives us far more. Fabrice Fitch

#### 'The Kreisler Story'

JS Bach/Kreisler Solo Violin Partita No 3. BWV1006 Falla/Kreisler Danza española Paganini/Kreisler Caprices, Op 1 - No 13; No 20. Moto perpetuo Kreisler La chasse (two recordings). Grave in the Style of WF Bach. Liebesfreud. Schön Rosmarin. Tempo di minuetto Poldini/Kreisler La poupée valsante Schubert/Kreisler Rosamunde - Ballet Music No 2 Tartini/Kreisler The Devil's Trill Wieniawski/Kreisler Caprices - A minor; E flat Daniel Röhn vn Paul Rivinius pf

Berlin Classics (F) 0300784BC (74' • DDD)



At least two challenges face any violinist who plays Fritz Kreisler's music. First, there

are the inimitable recordings by Kreisler himself, sui generis and among the glories of the gramophone, to which any pretender must inevitably be compared. Secondly, can the violinist inhabit convincingly the same world and, at the same time, make Kreisler's Sachertorten his own?

Daniel Rühn comes as close as I have heard on any all-Kreisler disc since James Ehnes (Analekta, 2/04). There is no attempt to emulate the master's idiosyncrasies - the short bow strokes using the middle of the bow, the continuous vibrato, the portamento, the sharply dotted staccato - but the essential charm, rhythmic vitality, sweet tone and parlando phrasing are all there. What's more, the programme mixes the familiar (Liebesfreud, Schön Rosmarin) with the less familiar (the two Wieniawski-Kreisler Caprices and the Grave in the Style of WF Bach), as well as boasting a world premiere.

This is the first recording of all six movements of Bach's Partita No 3 in E, BWV1006, with Kreisler's piano accompaniment. The Gavotte (the third movement, published in 1912 and recorded by Kreisler) is relatively well known. That and the opening Prelude are arguably also the most interesting movements but no one seems to have previously unearthed the other four. Sadly, the booklet yields no further information. Anyway, for those of us for whom the solo violin can quickly become too much like brown rice and lentils, Kreisler's tasteful additions are a mischievous delight, especially the cat-andmouse Prelude where the excellent Paul Rivinius comes into his own. It would surely have made Johann Sebastian smile.

The final track of the 21 is Kreisler's own 1911 recording of La chasse ('in the style of Jean-Baptiste Cartier', to give the rest of the title, omitted in the track listing) mixed with Rühn and Ravinus's. I'm not sure what we gain from this except to demonstrate that Kreisler was a genius and that Rühn is an exceptionally talented violinist well worth hearing. Jeremy Nicholas

#### 'Souvenirs d'Italie'

'Les carnets de voyages du Comte Harrach' Concertos and Sonatas and works by Caldara, Colista, Fiorenza, Hasse, Leo, Montanari, Piani, Sammartini and Sarro ensemble / Maurice Steger fl/rec

Harmonia Mundi © HMC90 2253 (73' • DDD)



Maurice Steger's latest album draws on the manuscript library of Count von

Harrach, an elderly musical and recorderminded Austrian diplomat who used a sixyear posting in Naples to gather a treasure trove of high-quality, expertly curated Italian music. Add Maurice Steger's own curating prowess and what we have here is a feast of stylistic, colouristic and emotional musical worlds, from the sunny grace of Sammartini's F major Concerto and Caldara's lilting Ciaccona a 3, with its cheerfully strumming Baroque guitar, to the long lyrical lines and dulcimer colour of Fiorenza's A minor Sonata. In true Steger style, the accompanying booklet's list of employed recorder sizes and models is also as long as your arm, although the only mid-work switch is between two F2 sopraninos (after Bressan and Denner) for Montanari's B flat major Concerto.

On to the performances themselves, and it must be said that some of them probably hold the potential to get the goat of straighter-laced recorder aficionados, given that as usual Steger has taken virtuoso showmanship to its apotheosis; for your amusement try listening to the outer movements of Hasse's Cantata per flauto - here an uber-presto pyrotechnical tour de force of coloratura - alongside Tabea Debus's still-allegro readings that come in at a whole minute longer (TYXArt). Likewise, its central Adagio sees him right in there from the off with his ornamentations where others might have begun with an initial no-frills statement.

But that's the thing; Steger is never dull, and while he may go for maximum velocity and more-ismore ornamentation, his attack and articulation are always varied, repeats are never the same and there's warmth and thought behind his every note, regardless of its speed. It's also heartwarming to behold the clear pleasure he takes in his zinging accompanying ensemble, going so far as to afford each of their instruments the same loving documentation as for his own recorders in the notes. Harpsichordist Naoki Kitaya also gets a pint-size but delightful solo spot with Leo's Toccata in C major.

In short, it's another Steger cracker of a recording. Well worth seeking out. **Charlotte Gardner** 

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### GRAMOPHONE Collector

## STRINGS TO BRILLIANT'S BOW

**Charlotte Gardner** listens to (mostly Baroque) Italian string music from Brilliant Classics, ranging from the familiar to the obscure



El Arte Mysico perform violin sonatas by Francesco Maria Veracini

here is no such thing as a "full price" Brilliant Classics CD', trumpets the company's website, and it's absolutely true; with the standard price for even a brand-new recording hovering around the £7 mark, the Dutch label even undercuts Naxos.

Cheap music does come at a price, though. Brilliant Classics' recordings are noticeably more crudely engineered than Naxos offerings. You also sense from the number of intonational glitches among the string players that time isn't plentiful in the recording sessions, which will inevitably take its toll when the majority of Brilliant's recording artists are young musicians at the start of their careers. Still. with the label's commitment to rare and unrecorded repertoire, and its particular focus on historically informed Baroque and early music performance, there are gems to be unearthed if you're prepared to hunt them out, as this latest quartet of releases demonstrates.

First up is the Spanish period ensemble El Arte Mysico's **Francesco Maria Veracini** Violin Sonatas Opp 1-3, which does sound a bit rough in places, but also contains some strong and enjoyable music-making. Violinists Angel Sampedro and Teresa Casanova share the first violin roles, and both do a solid musical job, ably supported by cellist Isabel Gomez-Serranillos and harpsichordist Diego Fernández. Add a bright and sonorous acoustic, and although

if given the choice I'd opt for Rüdiger Lotter and Lyriarte's Veracini sonatas on Oehms Classics – sweeter and more colourful – El Arte Mysico have produced a decent entry-level recording.

Cellist Adriano Maria Fazio's recording is perhaps stronger in terms of the actual performances although it falls down on its packaging. Despite the cover artwork listing six cello sonatas by Nicola Porpora and Giovanni Battista Costanzi, if you flip the case over or attempt to read the badly translated, floridly worded booklet-notes, you won't be any the wiser as to which man composed which sonatas. As it happens, this is because nobody really knows; the manuscripts list Porpora and Costanzi as joint composers, although the accepted wisdom appears to be that they were in fact by Porpora, possibly with cello advice from Costanzi. Woolly as all that might be, the notes need to spell it out. As for the recording itself, this is closely miked enough for Fazio's fingerboard work to be clearly audible, but this lends a sense of immediacy to the sound, all framed once again within a sonorous acoustic. It's not always the tidiest and most elegant of playing from either Fazio or violinist Katarzyna Solecka, but to some extent that's also a matter of taste, and the group are emotionally tight, with a nice balance of instruments.

Moving momentarily away from Italian Baroque chamber music and into late-19th-

and early-20th-century Italian chamber fare, the rarest repertoire in this pile is two string quartets by Roffredo Caetani (1871-1961). This lesser-spotted Italian was Franz Liszt's godson, and although he wasn't prolific he was moderately interesting, as these quartets indicate. His first quartet, in D, dates from 1888, when he was only 17, and his writing is both competent and full of conviction across his six seamlessly interlinked movements. His second quartet of 1907 is a very strange musical beast by contrast, its three movements cast in three separate tonalities, with an element of overall unification provided through his use of the Hungarian scale. The performers are the Alauda Quartet, who formed at the Royal Academy of Music in 2011 and were Park Lane Artists in 2015. They certainly give Caetani a fair crack of the whip here, even accounting for the odd intonational slip. So if you're into the obscure, then this is worth a punt.

Finally we come to Francesco Galligioni and L'Arte dell'Arco's Antonio Vivaldi Cello Sonatas. I've enjoyed previous L'Arte del Arco releases for Brilliant, and on this page this one is probably the recording I've most enjoyed. Galligioni has gone for a gentle, easy-on-the-ear sound (although he does suddenly dig surprisingly dirtily into his instrument at times, such as during RV41's first Allegro), and occasionally he magnifies this soft quality by switching the harpsichord for a chamber organ. There's a happy amount of stringiness too, thanks to lutenist Ivano Zanenghi featuring strongly in the balance. If you think you may be looking for a slightly brighter, more zesty sound, still within the budget price range, then you might want to try Jaap Ter Linden's recording, also on Brilliant Classics. Otherwise, though, even allowing for the range of options in these sonatas, if you don't want to spend a fortune then there's no need to look further. 6

#### THE RECORDINGS



**Veracini** Sonatas, Opp 1-3 **El Arte Mvsico** 

Brilliant Classics ® 95423



Porpora/Costanzi Six Cello Sonatas Adriano Maria Fazio et al Brilliant Classics ® 95408



**Caetani** Two String Quartets **Alauda Quartet** Brilliant Classics **®** 95198



Vivaldi Cello Sonatas Francesco Galligioni; L'Arte dell'Arco Brilliant Classics ® 95346

# John Ogdon

Bryce Morrison pays tribute to this colossus of 20th-century British piano playing whose repertoire was of epic proportions and whose relatively short life was far from easy

His teachers admitted that they were

he three iconic 20th-century British pianists are Solomon, Myra Hess and Clifford Curzon. But then there is John Ogdon, a pianist cut from different cloth. Different because although he was capable of delicate, luminous and fine-spun playing (shall I ever forget his performance of Ravel's 'Ondine' at a Royal Festival Hall recital given in the 1960s?), his demonic temperament, which could make the keyboard erupt into an engulfing inferno, was

opposed to the classically sculpted or the understated. His repertoire, unlike that of the other pianists mentioned above, was immense, extending through the Viennese

classics and the Romantics to modernism and the Second Viennese School. Ogdon was a fearless explorer of the less familiar. Alkan and Busoni featured in his gigantic programmes, and so did Sorabji's 252-page epic, Opus clavicembalisticum (a work he performed before an astonished London audience in the year before his death, aged 52). Again, turning from the well-tried and familiar, Ogdon was a tireless explorer of the modern and contemporary, happy to offer the shock of the new in music by Peter Maxwell Davies, Harrison Birtwistle and Alexander Goehr. And he was a no less tireless composer, with around 200 works to his credit. All this made him 'different', and the possessor of a quality described by

Vladimir Ashkenazy, his co-winner in the 1962 International Tchaikovsky Competition, as 'exotic' and charismatic in a way that mesmerised his Russian audiences.

Naturally, such prodigiously wide-ranging gifts left little time for systematic practice. The honing of note-perfect performance was left to others. He was in this sense the reverse of archperfectionists such as Lipatti (who demanded a few years of preparation before considering recording Beethoven's Emperor Concerto), Michelangeli (whose once sizeable repertoire dwindled to minute

proportions in a neurotic quest for a pianistic nirvana) and Moravec. Ogdon's teachers - who included Egon Petri and Denis Matthews - were never teachers in a conventional sense, admitting that they were mere coaches and advisers who were there to guide a talent of frightening proportions.

My first awareness of Ogdon came while I was looking through the prospectus for the 1956 Queen Elisabeth Competition in Brussels. I noted that there was a young

> British pianist offering, among other items, Beethoven's Hammerklavier Sonata, Sonatas, Balakirev's

mere coaches and advisers who were there Liszt's Dante and B minor to guide a talent of frightening proportions Islamey and Alkan's Fantasy for the left hand. Later, shortly after his triumph in

the 1962 Tchaikovsky Competition, I heard him play Tchaikovsky's and Liszt's First Concertos and witnessed an imaginative, daring and prodigious command that placed him on a level with the greatest Russian pianists, with Gilels and

An intensive international career was launched, and recording followed recording (some more carefully prepared than others). Outwardly courteous, diffident and deferential, Ogdon accepted ever more engagements, becoming known maliciously as 'Slogger Ogger'. The pace was frantic, leading to ill health and nervous breakdowns. The glamour

> of celebrity status (something alien to Ogdon's homely requirements) turned into a world of psychiatrists, hospitals and nightmarish confusion. Ogdon had, quite simply, overreached himself and the results later the subject of two films and most notably Charles Beauclerk's magisterial book Piano Man (Simon & Schuster: 2014) - became evident in performances that could range from the sublime to the disastrous. A student who was asked to play for Ogdon during his spell teaching at Indiana University found himself

marooned in a cloud of

cigarette smoke and with

#### **DEFINING MOMENTS**

•1956 – Brahms conducted by Barbirolli

Performs Brahms's First Concerto while a student in Manchester

•1957 – Graduation in Manchester

Graduates from the Royal Manchester College of Music

•1958 – Performs Busoni's Piano Concerto for the first time Busoni's epic work played in Liverpool with John Pritchard and the RLPO. He later records it with the RPO under Daniell Revenaugh

•1959 – London double debut

Proms debut in Liszt's First Concerto, with the London Symphony Orchestra under Basil Cameron; also London debut recital

•1961 – Debut recording, and competition victory First EMI recording issued – featuring music by Liszt and Busoni; and he wins first prize in the London Liszt Competition

•1962 – Breakthrough in Russia

Wins joint first prize with Vladimir Ashkenazy in the International Tchaikovsky Competition in Moscow

• 1988 – Performs Sorabji's near five-hour-long solo work – live His first complete performance in public of *Opus clavicembalisticum*, three months before the composer's death. A studio recording made in 1985-86 was released on Altarus in 1989, before Ogdon's untimely death



only the most evasive advice on offer in response to his performance of the whole of the *Hammerklavier* Sonata. For Ogdon, alcohol and cigarettes became inseparable companions, and he was asked to resign after a short stay in academe.

Ogdon's career followed its erratic course until his death

aged 52 in 1989. He was a figure wrecked by hyperactivity and an ever-changing cocktail of medically recommended drugs. But his legend lives on, most notably in the six-disc set of his complete RCA recordings. Here is musical glory to compensate those left only with memories of those tragic years. Bypassing a less than happy Liszt recital (a frantic 'Feux follets' and a Niagara Falls view of the alpine stream

THE ESSENTIAL RECORDING



'The Complete RCA Album Collection' John Ogdon pf RPO / Igor Buketoff RCA (8/14)

of 'Au bord d'une source'), there is awe-inspiring Alkan, Rachmaninov, Beethoven, Nielson and Mennin. As I said in my review in 2014, 'In an age of much anodyne playing, Ogdon's recreative vision and frenzy will always stand out as a force of nature.'

In summary: at his greatest, Ogdon made you easily forget

greatest, Ogdon made you easily forget the confusion that could strike at his performances like so much destructive lightning. In the Alkan Concerto, the two Rachmaninov sonatas, Beethoven's *Hammerklavier* and Nielson's Chaconne his playing is as lucid as it is mighty and inexorable. Asked to name a single disc for my desert island, it would have to be Beethoven's *Hammerklavier* Sonata, that Mount Everest of the keyboard; a giant masterpiece played by a giant pianist. **6** 

# Instrumental



Patrick Rucker rejoices in Alexander Melnikov's Prokofiev:

'Melnikov's performances replace brute power with pellucid textures and a kaleidoscope of brilliant colours' > REVIEW ON PAGE 65



# Jed Distler welcomes Scriabin sonatas from Peter Donohoe:

Lightning runs, trills and murky bassregister chords interact in almost threedimensional perspective' > REVIEW ON PAGE 67

#### Beethoven · Chopin · Enescu

**Beethoven** Two Rondos, Op 51 **Chopin** Ballade No 3, Op 47. Introduction et Rondo, Op 16. Nocturne No 16, Op 55 No 2. Polonaise No 6, 'Heroic', Op 53 **Enescu** Suite No 2, Op 10 **Charles Richard-Hamelin** pf

Analekta © AN2 9129 (69' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Palais Montcalm, Quebec,
May 2016



A French-Canadian pianist named Hamelin, but not *that* one and no relation.

Charles Richard-Hamelin (silver medallist at the 2015 Chopin Competition) was 26 years old when he recorded this live recital and the maturity of his playing is impressive. So too is the scope of his recital, which avoids the obvious. In Beethoven's Op 51 Rondos he is particularly responsive to the Second Rondo's more capricious moments, while its close, with a sudden outbreak of high spirits, is delightful.

The Chopin sequence, which closes the disc, mixes the familiar and lesser known. His take on the Third Ballade is refreshingly Classical, if not perhaps displaying as much personality as it might have done. On the other hand, his way with the early *Introduction and Rondo*, balancing delicacy and sinew without a hint of sentimentality, is very telling. The applause after this is startling as the audience have been largely silent up to that point. And in the concluding Polonaise he finds plenty to talk about without merely obsessing over its rhythm.

But the highlight for me was Enescu's Second Suite. I have to confess this was new to be – but what a piece! Enescu is still underrated as a composer, his huge gifts as violinist, pianist, conductor and educator meaning that he lived many more lives than most of us could imagine. He wrote the Suite for a competition in 1903 and it sounds like a piano arrangement of a symphonic work, so vividly is it coloured. The opening Toccata is suffused with the sounds of bells and Richard-Hamelin is alive

to its sense of joy. In the Sarabande he becomes utterly inward, relishing its more urgent inner section, spiced with whole-tone harmonies. Everywhere, he displays a strong sense of narrative, making him a compelling storyteller. The most inward point of the Suite comes with a flickering Pavane, which conjures the sound world of the Debussy of *Pour le piano*. Richard-Hamelin fully embraces the celebratory nature of the closing Bourrée, contrasting fanfares with brilliant post-Lisztian passagework. Captured in a warmly immediate recording, Richard-Hamelin is a welcome new voice on the pianistic firmament. Harriet Smith

# Bloch · Dallapiccola · Ligeti

Bloch Three Solo Cello Suites
Dallapiccola Ciaccona, Intermezzo e Adagio
Ligeti Solo Cello Sonata
Natalie Clein VC

Hyperion © CDA68155 (64' • DDD)



Despite the appeal and popularity of Bloch's *Schelomo*, his three solo cello suites have not

been widely recorded. They were written late in the composer's life, in 1956-57, after he had retired from teaching at the University of California, Berkeley, and were inspired by the Canadian cellist Zara Nelsova. Unfortunately, Nelsova, who worked closely with Bloch in the years after the end of the Second World War, left no recording of the pieces. The German cellist Peter Bruns recorded them in 1997, on a disc that also included key cello works from earlier in the composer's career, including From Fewish Life and Baal Shem, when Bloch was self-consciously interested in discovering within himself what it meant to be a Jewish composer.

The late-in-life solo suites are very different in tone from those earlier works, more meditative and introspective, and while listeners will easily detect similar melodic contours to the music Bloch was writing in his Jewish Cycle works, these suites lack the long, ardent lines of *Schelomo*, though none of its expressive power. Cellist Natalie Clein keeps the expressive range within autumnal parameters: melancholy, lightly fretful, inward and dignified. Whereas Bruns is more forcefully rhetorical and demonstrative, Clein plays intimately, as if for herself alone. But there is nothing hermetic about her approach. Gently, insistently, quietly, she draws the listener into Bloch's music and the results are thoroughly absorbing.

Rather than pair these relatively short works – made up of four or five movements each, most lasting only a few minutes - with other works by Bloch, Clein couples them with Dallapiccola's 1945 Ciaccona, Intermezzo e Adagio, thorny but powerful, written at the same time as he was working on his tremendously bleak opera Il prigioniero, and Ligeti's 1948-53 two-movement Sonata for solo cello. Clein is every bit as commanding in the formidably difficult Dallapiccola as she is retiring in the Bloch, and her performance of the Adagio theme in the Ligeti is four minutes of pure, concentrated beauty. This lovely disc reveals the cello as a kind of private sketch pad, or journal, capturing big emotions on a small scale, with a poetic concentration in sharp contrast to the larger, more furious musical gestures of the post-

war moment. Philip Kennicott

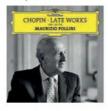
Bloch – selected comparison: Bruns (6/00) (OP111) OPS30-232

#### Chopin

'Late Works'

Barcarolle, Op 60. Three Mazurkas, Op 59. Three Mazurkas, Op 63. Mazurka, Op *posth* 68 No 4. Two Nocturnes, Op 62. Polonaise No 7, 'Polonaise-fantaisie', Op 61. Three Waltzes, Op 64 **Maurizio Pollini** *pf* 

DG (F) 479 6127GH (55' • DDD)



'I'm in love with Chopin – his music never ceases to amaze me', Pollini is quoted

**62 GRAMOPHONE** FEBRUARY 2017 gramophone.co.uk



A longtime champion of Henselt's music, Daniel Grimwood gives lovingly phrased, thoughtful performances (review on page 64)

as saying on the jewel case of his latest CD. If only it sounded like it. The first thing that alienates me is the sound: the bass slightly too immediate, the treble slightly muffled, the mid-register slightly woolly, the general over-pedalling. It's almost as though we're sitting in the page-turner's position rather than in the audience. Then, as the Barcarolle unfolds, it's the boxed-in rhythms that are puzzling, along with the restricted colours, and the lack of sufficient dynamic range to articulate properly either the short-term gestures or the long-term structure. All of which proves characteristic of the recital as a whole.

The best construction I can put on this is that Pollini is attempting to show that late Chopin should be stripped of the usual attributes of pianistic flair and allowed to speak unencumbered by personal intervention, trusting that it will weave its own spell without all that baggage. Certainly the nocturnes, mazurkas and waltzes here sound as severe and uningratiating as the larger-scale Barcarolle and Polonaise-fantaisie. No lilt, no magic, no sense of wonder, only a few flickerings of poetry, and beyond the obvious technical fluency and control no virtues that might compensate for the losses. I confess I struggled to concentrate all the way to the end. What on earth happened to the Pollini

who was something close to a god for me in my far-off student days? **David Fanning** 

#### Fauré

Barcarolles – No 3, Op 42; No 12, Op 106bis. Impromptu No 5, Op 102. Nocturnes – No 1, Op 33 No 1; No 7, Op 74; No 13, Op 119. Nine Preludes, Op 103. Romance sans paroles, Op 17 No 3. Thème et variations, Op 73 **Hannes Minnaar** pf



This recital (for it is precisely that; a DVD of the event, expertly filmed in January

2016, accompanies the SACD) by the Dutch pianist Hannes Minnaar seems the equivalent of strolling through an engaging exhibition of the works of an artist you thought you knew but the magnitude of whose gifts, you now realise, you hadn't entirely grasped. It is expertly curated, with a deeply personal selection of representative artworks spanning Fauré's career, from an early, insouciant *Romance sans paroles* from his student days to the 13th and last Nocturne of 1921, with its unconventional dissonances and voice-

leading reflecting Fauré's state of mind shortly after the death of his mentor, Saint-Saëns, and as deafness eventually overcame him. Though presented chronologically, this loving selection was clearly chosen to show each piece to greatest advantage, sometimes creating striking juxtapositions. The engineers have captured the immediacy and dimension of Minnaar's beautiful, unforced sound in all its wealth of detail.

The *Thème et variations* is delivered with a rare sweep and cohesion, its urgency paradoxically never seeming rushed, but organically flowing. The rarely encountered Nine Preludes, Op 103, unfold with gem-like precision and sparkle, each a perfectly wrought microcosm. But it is the 13th Nocturne that is both the crux and culmination of the programme. Its painful quest through desolation erupts into lacerating figurations. Minnaar negotiates this occasionally awkward writing with skill, creating a palpable emotional impact.

Comparison with the first release of Louis Lortie's projected complete Fauré series (Chandos, 11/16) confirms the validity of diverse approaches to the French master. Minnaar's identification with this unique realm of music is complete and his deeply felt interpretations shine with clarity and infinite nuance. If Fauré's piano music

has eluded you until now, these performances may provide the key. If you're already a devotee, a very pleasurable experience awaits. Patrick Rucker

#### Haydn

Piano Sonatas - HobXVI/20; HobXVI/34; HobXVI/50; HobXVI/52. Sonata (Un piccolo divertimento: Variations), HobXVII/6

Leon McCawley pf

Somm Céleste F SOMMCD0162 (79' • DDD)



No doubt about it, compared to the Mozart piano sonatas Haydn's are still

neglected. Jean-Efflam Bavouzet's extended project for Chandos is – I hope – ongoing: he has promised us volumes of sonatas dispatched in the course of his travels like postcards, 'undertaken with the greatest passion for trying to convey as vividly as possible to 21st-century ears the boundless treasures of this sublime music'. I've got everything in his series so far and some of the comparable one by Marc-André Hamelin for Hyperion. Of him I am less sure. The high finish is admirable, if a bit predictable and heartless, and he engages only fitfully with Haydn's humanity and sophistication. The innocuous assurance takes him down conventional routes and he plays what's written with never any decoration or variation of repeats. Leon McCawley takes that road too.

I like McCawley's vigour and spiritedness in quick numbers - well in place, for example, in the outer movements of the C major 'English' Sonata (No 50 in Hoboken's catalogue), as well as in the fine first movement of the E minor Sonata (No 34) that so many of us learnt when we were young. You sense he's a cultivated player with exceptional technical address, and his rhythm is immaculate whatever the tempo. But that's as far as he gets. He gives a reading of the printed text as if afraid of accepting any challenge towards freethinking adventurousness. So, you listen on, maybe disappointed in particular in the C minor Sonata (No 20) that Haydn is being kept in his traditional place as a pleasing 'opener', allowing a recitalist to settle and warm up – Mozart's sonatas used to be diminished similarly. Bayouzet however has shown that this C minor work can be counted one of the miracles of Haydn's earlier years, and even as the first great piano sonata of all. But you don't arrive at that position without taking a leap, intellectually and musically and with instinct there too, to get way beyond 'what's written'.

The last sonata of all, No 52 in E flat, the one that exploits everything Haydn had learnt about piano-writing and its capacity for imitating orchestral colour, stacks up much better with McCawley. Thereafter the F minor Variations is another let-down. his performance not engaging with one of the 18th century's tragic utterances for the instrument. I could go on. I have known McCawley's playing since the 1993 Leeds Competition. What's certain is that he deserves better recording than Somm has given him here. The piano is not well tuned and is reproduced with a harsh metallic edge that is unpleasant. I put up with it before going back to Brendel in the Variations (Decca, 1/10), to Bayouzet's Chandos series (Vol 3 - 12/11) and to a double album of Haydn András Schiff made for Teldec nearly 20 years ago (it includes Sonata No 52 - 5/99). McCawley may not quite measure up to these great players but it's the sound that is such a drawback here. Stephen Plaistow

#### Henselt

Ballade, Op 31. Berceuse (Wiegenlied), WoO (Op 45). Deux Nocturnes, Op 6. Deux Petites valses, Op 28. Four Impromptus. Grande valse, 'L'aurore boréale' ('Das Nordlicht'), Op 30. Mon chant du cygne (Mein Schwanengesang), WoO. Tableau musical: Fantaisie sur un air bohémienrusse, WoO (Op 16). Valse mélancolique, Op 36. Variations de concert sur le motif de l'opéra 'L'elisir d'amore', Op 1. Vöglein-Etüde ('Si oiseau j'étais', Op 2 No 6

**Daniel Grimwood** *pf*Edition Peters (F) EPSO05 (78' • DDD)



All-Henselt discs are few and far between (the last in these pages was Piers Lane's less

than successful accounts of the Opp 2 and 5 Studies – Hyperion, 2/05). We should hear more of him. Even sniffy Schumann admired his music - 'the Chopin of the North' - and he can rightly be regarded as the father of the Russian school of piano playing (he taught Rachmaninov's father and Zverev, Rachmaninov's teacher). But his inconsistency means you have to cherry pick. No pianist could disguise the paucity of invention and originality in some of the waltzes and impromptus presented here, let alone the seemingly endless Fantaisie sur un air bohémien-russe, all redolent of dingy, cobwebbed ballrooms, antimacassars and pianos with covered legs.

The best of Henselt, though, is unmissable in the right hands. Daniel Grimwood is a longtime champion of the composer and has had most of this music in his fingers for some time - and it shows. In Henselt's most famous and oft-recorded work, 'Si oiseau j'étais' (Étude No 6 from the Op 2 set), he is superbly fleet and fluent. This brief study, which Grimwood himself describes as 'a sadistic exercise in double notes', is dispatched only three seconds slower than Rachmaninov's miraculous 1923 recording. Then there is the Ballade, Op 31, the longest work here (13'53"), inferior to Chopin in its melodic appeal but a powerful tone poem nevertheless, with astonishing outbursts of flailing despair. In this and the opening track, the Variations on a theme from L'elisir d'amore (1837, premiered by Clara Schumann), Grimwood easily outshines the splashy Rüdiger Steinfatt (Koch Schwann, 1987). Among many other highlights are the second of the two Op 6 Nocturnes, 'La fontaine', and the once popular Wiegenlied, which are given lovingly phrased, thoughtful performances.

So there is plenty to enjoy on this well-recorded, handsomely presented disc, one that begs a second volume of Grimwood in the complete études and, fingers crossed, a third featuring the lonely pinnacle that is Henselt's Piano Concerto. Jeremy Nicholas

#### Liszt



Complete Hungarian Rhapsodies **Vincenzo Maltempo** pf

Piano Classics ® 2 PCLD0108 (150' • DDD)



In 1968 Alfred Brendel shrewdly observed of Liszt's Rhapsodies, 'these are the pieces we

perhaps have the most to make restitution to'. Nearly 50 years later, that remains a debt still largely unpaid, despite many worthy attempts. However, this complete set comes very close to settling accounts. The 31-year-old Italian pianist Vincenzo Maltempo has already created a niche for himself with a series of Alkan recordings (on Piano Classics and Toccata Classics), not to mention a 2008 Liszt disc (Gramola) that includes, among other things, a *Norma* Fantasy of extraordinary breadth and nobility. In fact those two qualities also permeate these *Hungarian Rhapsodies*, which I don't hesitate to call the finest I've heard.

One of the more striking aspects of Maltempo's approach to these works is his inerrant sense of timing. There's no rush to arrival: every scintillating detail is savoured at leisure, without a trace of decadent indulgence. Lyrical passages, so often sunk by the weight of misplaced rubato, here speak with an earnest ardour, lending them



'Extraordinary breadth and nobility': Vincenzo Maltempo plays Liszt's Hungarian Rhapsodies

a disarming, youthful freshness. That said, tempos are amply pliant and rubato, when applied, is richly luxuriant. The rhythmic spine of the material always remains intact, so that rhetorical thrust is never lost to detail. Finally, Maltempo's *presto leggiero* in *fioritura* passages is little short of perfection.

The scrupulously observed dotted semiquaver/demisemiquaver figures in Rhapsody No 5, the 'Heroïde élégiaque', fix its funereal character and dignity. In No 6, as elsewhere, Maltempo is at pains to observe Liszt's agogic markings, and the repeated octaves of the friss are sensate and musical. Feather-like pianissimo glissandos in the playfully capricious No 10 are brilliantly executed, while the tremolos of No 11 disperse into the air like pungent incense. Shapeliness characterises Rhapsody No 12, its opening declamations bold and square-shouldered rather than strident. The desolate laments at the beginning of No 13 speak of ancient, inconsolable sorrow. Most remarkable here is how the entire *lassú* unfolds in an integral, coherent whole, rather than stopping and starting in a series of mini-climaxes. The friss, famously incorporated by Sarasate into his Zigeunerweisen, arrives, as if by insinuation, with the tinkling of tiny bells. The last four Rhapsodies, dating from three decades after the final versions of the first set of 15, emerge as craggy, inscrutable, enigmatic utterances whose smouldering fire affords little heat. Their apt realisation is richly imaginative and like no other.

The single stylistic slip I heard was at the very beginning of Rhapsody No 1, where the trochees are misread as iambs. Yet, unlike so many pianists who consider the Rhapsodies licence for all manner of vulgarity, Maltempo faithfully observes Liszt's text, apart from interpolations from the *Hungarian Fantasy* into Rhapsody No 14. This well-recorded set, thoughtfully and reverently conceived, captures the magic Liszt invested in these richly evocative pieces, unique in the 19th-century literature. Patrick Rucker

#### **Prokofiev**

Piano Sonatas - No 2, Op 14; No 6, Op 82; No 8, Op 84 **Alexander Melnikov** *pf* Harmonia Mundi (®) HMC90 2202 (70' • DDD)



To listeners who know Alexander Melnikov's cultivated musicality and fastidious pianism – so beautifully manifest in the series of Schumann trios and concertos with Isabelle Faust, Jean-Guihen Queyras and the Freiburg Baroque Orchestra under Pablo Heras-Casado - his decision to record all nine Prokofiev sonatas may seem an abrupt shift of gear. Apart from an early recording of the Visions fugitives (still available as a download from Sacrambow), Melnikov's recent traversals of the Russian literature have focused on Scriabin. Rachmaninov and of course his muchacclaimed Shostakovich (8/10, 5/12). Though resident in the West for some time now, Melnikov's credentials as a product of the 'Russian School' are unmistakable. Yet these fresh, strikingly original readings of two of the 'War Sonatas' coupled with the early Second Sonata suggest something well beyond the canonic Russian approach to Prokofiev.

Melnikov's performances replace brute power with pellucid textures and a kaleidoscope of brilliant colours. Grinding motoric rhythms are superseded by an infinitely calibrated kinaesthetic sense of almost terrifying intensity. Transitions of tempo occur with the natural inevitability of a living, breathing organism. The precise dimensions and shapes of Prokofiev's structures appear in sharp focus while his





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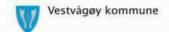












musical narratives, for all their wealth of detail, unfold with undistracted purpose. In all this, Melnikov's dazzling virtuosity is never an end in itself but the servant of his vivid imagination.

The *Allegretto* scherzo of the Sixth Sonata evokes the orchestral richness of the Fifth Symphony, giving way to the third movement's slow waltz, recalling the arcing lyricism of *Romeo and Juliet*. Without sacrificing clarity, the toccata-like finale is breathtaking in its sheer velocity. Though the more circumspect Eighth Sonata divulges its secrets with greater reticence, Melnikov's close reading of the score delivers a performance of searing impact.

The sound is consistent with Harmonia Mundi's customarily high standards. Comparison with other recordings is difficult. There is something here of the mercurial imagination of Sofronitsky, as well as of Richter's hyper-sensitivity and Gilels's executive perfection. But ultimately, these performances are unmistakably Melnikov's own, representing, I believe, a new level of Prokofiev interpretation. Patrick Rucker

#### **Scriabin**

Complete Piano Sonatas. Vers la flamme, Op 72 **Peter Donohoe** pf

Somm (F) (2) SOMMCD262-2 (140' • DDD)



On February 18, 2015, Peter Donohoe undertook a remarkable tour

de force of concentration, stamina and technical prowess by playing all 10 Scriabin sonatas in a single recital. Fortunately he had a full six days to make this studio recording of the cycle. That's still quite an undertaking, of course, yet there's nothing in these recordings that sounds remotely ragged, tired, dynamically compromised or phoned in. Yes, you may prefer Marc-André Hamelin's lighter, suppler touch at times, Vladimir Ashkenazy's more tumultuous climaxes in the late works or Anna Malikova's consistency of linear projection, not to mention classic noncyclical individual interpretations by Horowitz (Nos 9 and 10), Richter (No 5) and Volodos (No 7). Nor does Somm's engineering match the warmth and luminosity distinguishing Maria Lettberg's outstanding complete Scriabin piano music survey on Capriccio. Still, there's much to claim for Donohoe's intelligently big pianism. His slow and carefully calculated build-up at the outset of the First Sonata's finale pulls you in as much as his

unpressured, conversational spin on No 2's dizzying *Presto*.

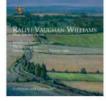
Donohoe leans into the accented dissonances of No 3's Allegretto and inflects the Andante's counterlines more than other pianists of note. No 4's opening Andante doesn't get soft enough for its spicy harmonies and curving lines to ooze their expected sexiness, although by holding the Prestissimo volando's leaping chords in relatively quiet check, Donohoe's abandon in the final peroration makes more of an impact. He understands and plays up No 5's extreme contrasts, albeit without Richter's litheness and transparency. Nos 6 and 7 and the arguably overextended No 8 find Donohoe on top form; they feature lovely textural layering, where lightning runs, trills and murky bassregister chords interact in almost threedimensional perspective.

I prefer No 9's opening pages to unfold in a more muted, disembodied manner than Donohoe's briskly straightforward reading suggests, but his sonority and expressive palette soon open up. And if No 10 doesn't receive the craziest rendition in the catalogue, Donohoe's stylish mastery manifests itself in regard to his wellproportioned pacing, subtly shaded trills and playful shaping of the final fast passages. In Vers la flamme, Donohoe's rolling dynamic surges and weighty tremolos evoke Richter's masses of lava rather than Horowitz's stinging fireworks. It is a tribute to Donohoe's authority and experience that his Scriabin interpretations hold their own and have something to say in a crowded and competitive catalogue.

Jed Distler

#### **Vaughan Williams**

Symphony No 5. The Running Set.
Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis **Anthony Goldstone, Caroline Clemmow** pfs
Albion (§) ALBCDO31 (55' • DDD)



Much painstaking detective work and considerable editorial expertise went into

this first recording of Vaughan Williams's Fifth Symphony in an early incarnation for two pianos. A close inspection of the unpublished manuscript with its many annotations, crossings-out and pastings-in revealed just how closely Michael Mullinar (1895-1973) collaborated with the composer. Unlike Mullinar's own stylish one- and two-piano arrangements of the Sixth Symphony (of which he was the dedicatee), we do not know precisely

when it was performed but can be pretty sure that it received at least one playthrough with friends and colleagues in attendance (as was the composer's wont when introducing new works). Fascinating listening it makes, too, its infinitely subtle harmonic palette illuminated to frequently revelatory effect. Lovers of this symphony (arguably the most technically assured and elegantly proportioned of the composer's nine) should most certainly investigate, safe in the knowledge that RVW's heartwarming inspiration is marvellously served on this occasion by Anthony Goldstone and Caroline Clemmow.

The experienced husband-and-wife duo lend equally idiomatic and bracingly articulate advocacy to the two-piano arrangement by Vally Lasker and Helen Bidder (who served on the teaching staff with Holst at St Paul's School, Hammersmith) of the sprightly 1933 dance medley The Running Set. Annotator John Francis recalls how RVW was dismayed that one newspaper critic had failed to recognise the Highland jig, 'Cock o' the North', and quoted instead some dodgy lines from the drinking song 'Aunty Mary', which uses the same tune ('Chase me Charlie, Chase me Charlie, I've lost a leg of my drawers')! Maurice Jacobson's sympathetic reworking of the Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis was published in 1947, and I'd take these artists' ideally cogent and passionate view over a goodly number of orchestral rivals. Excellent sound and balance, too, the results always firmly focused and truthful in timbre.

By way of a sad postscript, news has just reached me that Anthony Goldstone passed away on January 2, 2017, aged 72. This nourishing Albion release stands as a worthy memorial to his sterling musicianship. Andrew Achenbach

#### 'Bach 2 the Future, Vol 2'

(6

JS Bach Solo Violin Sonata No 3, BWV1005 Beamish Intrada e Fuga Maxwell Davies Sonatina for Violin Alone, Op 334 Sibelius En glad musikant Stravinsky Elégie Sutton Arpeggiare Variations Ysaÿe Solo Violin Sonata, 'Ballade', Op 27 No 3

Fenella Humphreys vn Champs Hill (© CHRCD118 (72' • DDD)



It's not often that you can say that a commission, or set of commissions, fills

a genuine hole in the repertoire. However, that's precisely what Fenella Humphreys

has bestowed upon the musical world with 'Bach 2 the Future'.

The story goes that, having decided to take on the Bach Solo Sonata and Partita movements she'd previously shied away from, Humphreys found there to be comparatively little unaccompanied violin music to programme alongside them. Or, more specifically, very little British solo violin music. So she commissioned six new works from Cheryl Frances-Hoad, Gordon Cross, Piers Hellawell, Adrian Sutton, Sally Beamish and Peter Maxwell Davies, all of which were to use the Bach as their inspirational starting points. As a result, although Hilary Hahn recently commissioned 27 unaccompanied violin works for her own 'Encores' project, Humphreys's commissions are excitingly fresh with their all-British focus.

So, now we finally have all six pieces in our hands (it's three per volume, programmed alongside Bach and other solo unaccompanied works), the main take-home point is that every single one of the six is a glorious new addition to the solo violin repertoire. Vol 2 itself is a stylistic and emotional cornucopia of contrasts; it opens with Sutton's Arpeggiare Variations, a deftly constructed contrapuntal exploration of the possibilities of the arpeggio. Then Sally Beamish's Norwegian- and folk-influenced Intrada e Fuga is entirely different, as is Maxwell Davies's melancholic Sonatina for Violin Alone, and Humphreys's utter absorption and delight in all three shines forth at every turn. A particular joy is her realisation of the contrapuntal partwriting that is such a feature of these three and the other works on the disc, carving it with a strong-toned, easy fluidity and immaculate technique.

Both volumes will be making frequent returns to my stereo. More than that, though, the new works themselves deserve long wider performance lives beyond this beautiful beginning. Charlotte Gardner

#### **'Early Transcriptions'**

JS Bach/Busoni Chaconne (Partita No 2, BWV1004) Handel/Liszt Sarabande und Chaconne zu dem Singspiel Almira, S181 Marcello/JS Bach Concerto, BWV974 Mozart/ Liszt/Howard Fantasie über Themen aus die Oper Le nozze di Figaro und Don Giovanni, S697 Mariam Batsashvili pf

Cobra © COBRAO056 (56' • DDD)



Georgian-born Mariam Batsashvili won first prize at the 2014 International Franz Liszt Competition in Utrecht, the first female artist to carry off the trophy; and in her debut recording (disregarding a disc of performances from the competition) she lives up to that billing. Admittedly these somewhat curiously titled 'Early Transcriptions' absolve her to a degree from interpretative responsibility, since that job has already largely been done by the arrangements themselves. But she undoubtedly shows the requisite agility and range of touch and temperament that establish trust in her artistry.

The Marcello is by no means an obvious choice. True, its slow movement used to be a favoured encore piece. But there is little a pianist can bring to the fast outer movements beyond level-headed musicianship, as Batsashvili offers here. Nor is the Handel/Liszt Sarabande und Chaconne exactly an attention-grabber, with Liszt in comparatively restrained mood. The Bach-Busoni Chaconne is at the other extreme, of course - the acme of attentionseeking. If Batsashvili doesn't embrace its gothic excesses as wholeheartedly as certain virtuosos of yore, that may actually be a bonus for some listeners. Similarly, the Mozart/Liszt/Howard conflation is carefully and persuasively unfolded but without the full monty of abandon and calculated tastelessness it invites (demands?). All fair enough for a debutante, you might say.

The rather airless acoustic gives a feeling of listening forensically in a classroom rather than in the warm, communicative environment of a concert hall. I do look forward to hearing Mariam Batsashvili in the future but she deserves more sympathetic recording. David Fanning

#### 'Encores after Beethoven'

JS Bach Keyboard Partita No 1, BWV825 Menuet; Gigue. Prelude and Fugue, BWV867
Beethoven Andante favori, WoO57 Haydn
Keyboard Sonata, HobXVI/44 Mozart Eine
kleine Gigue, 574 Schubert Allegretto, D915.
Allegro assai, D946 No 3. Hungarian Melody, D81
András Schiff pf

ECM New Series 

481 4474 (52' • DDD)
Recorded live at the Tonhalle, Zurich,
March 2004 - May 2006



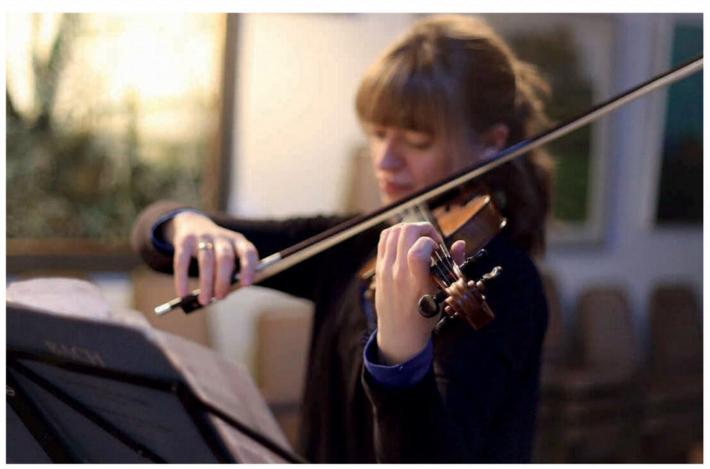
I've enjoyed this enormously. The recordings – all live at the Zurich Tonhalle,

with applause – are issued for the first time as a collection of the 'encores after Beethoven' András Schiff gave during a cycle of the 32 sonatas between 2004 and 2006. At 52 minutes they amount to a feast of distinguished playing at the classical end of the pianist's repertory – from Bach, Haydn and Mozart through Beethoven to Schubert – and the CD is available as a 'bonus' in the new box collecting together his ECM sonata cycle or as a freestanding single disc. If you think of encores as lightweight, think again. These composers wrote many characteristic pieces that are less ambitious than full-dress sonatas but are not to be dismissed as miniatures. Shorter compositions, yes, but with long thoughts behind them.

The delightful essay in the booklet is by Schiff himself. What to play after an evening of, say, five Beethoven sonatas? Nothing, many pianists would insist. And Schiff is in the ranks of those who, after the last Sonata of all (C minor, Op 111), would regard the addition of anything other than silence as a terrible error of judgement. Yet while not minded to bully people to think as he does, he feels with a why-not attitude that there's no reason to deny an enthusiastic public a few more offerings provided they're related to the previously heard sonatas. Not trifles of course, and not too many, but something.

They range in length and scope here from Mozart's little Gigue in G major, K574 (1'42" and so treacherous to play) to Haydn's two-movement Sonata in G minor (No 44 in Hoboken) that has prompted the attention of several great players, Sviatoslav Richter included (13'37", including all repeats). As a makeweight to Beethoven's two Op 49 Sonatas, designed to be within the reach of amateurs and always included in cycles of the 32 (but where?), it's an inspired choice. So little is vouchsafed by Haydn as to dynamics and expression, and yet this sonata is clearly an exceptional inspiration for an interpreter with Schiff's insights. Listen to him, and indulge me please for banging on about Haydn's piano music yet again.

As he suggests, playing Beethoven's Andante favori within hailing distance of the Waldstein Sonata - it was originally conceived as the Sonata's middle movement - isn't a bad idea. Nor is the B flat minor Prelude and Fugue from Book 1 of Bach's '48' a contentious choice as an envoi to the Hammerklavier Sonata. The '48' was Beethoven's bible, as it had been for Mozart and has been for every composer since. Schiff would like us to accept that his other Bach pieces and especially his three Schubert items are also closely related to the Beethoven given just before. If you know the sonatas well and are perhaps a keen player yourself, listen with surprise and delight to the



Fenella Humphreys has commissioned British works for solo violin, which she programmes alongside solo Bach

connections, which will assuredly be more acute if you have the music under your fingers. Don't worry, however, if you haven't. Schiff regards the public as 'a vitally important part of the proceedings' and wants to share the music with all of us.

He tells a story against himself when, aged 23, on his debut at the Vienna Musikverein, he returned to the stage after performing Bartók's Third Concerto with János Ferencsik and played something of Haydn. 'Young man', said Ferencsik, waiting in the wings, 'mark my words. There is nothing worse than a prematurely given encore.' Advice Schiff says he has never forgotten. Did you ever hear the piano sound like a cimbalom? For a last delectable sample of his 'documents of a long journey', Îet me suggest Schubert's Hungarian Melody in B minor, D817. These days he never returns to his homeland and fulminates against it. How lucky we are to have him here. Stephen Plaistow

#### 'The Glass Effect'

Arnalds Erla's Waltz, Tomorrow's Song Dessner Suite Frahm Ambre. In the Sky and On the Ground Glass Études - selection. Koyaanisqatsi. Lift Off Ludwig-Leone Night Loops Muhly A Hudson Cycle. Quiet Music

Lavinia Meijer hp Sony Classical ® ② 88985 35143-2 (116' • DDD)



Lavinia Meijer's debut recording of Glass's music (Channel Classics, 3/13) was

a rather underwhelming experience. Consisting mainly of the dark Metamorphosis cycle and even gloomier suite from the soundtrack to The Hours, the recording lacked edge despite the evident musicality of Meijer's performances.

Four years later and the bar is raised much higher. Glass's set of 20 Études represents some of the composer's most challenging music for piano. Meijer's decision to tackle 10 of them (five each from Books 1 and 2) on harp alone deserves credit; but in perfectly shaping each étude to the nuances and dynamics of the instrument itself, Meijer has produced an extraordinary recording.

Glass's music is essentially tonal but a lot of the chord sequences shift gear up or down a semitone. Easy enough on the piano but exceedingly tricky to execute on the harp without an unsolicited snap or buzz from one of the pedals. You wouldn't know it

from listening to Meijer, however. From the crystal-clear articulation of Étude No 1, which announces its arrival powerfully with an opening four-chord statement, to the deafening stillness which greets the end of No 20, Meijer does not put a foot (or hand, for that matter) wrong.

Much of her brilliant playing, aided by an excellent sound recording, is also transferred to the music of the five composers contained on the second disc. Bryce Dessner's three-movement Suite is étude-like, culminating in a highly atmospheric study in sixths. Having worked as Glass's assistant for many years, Nico Muhly is the more likely recipient of 'The Glass Effect' but the influence is found more in the younger composer's use of block chords or three-against-two pulses of A Hudson Cycle than in Quiet Music. The delicate, understated beauty of Ólafur Arnalds's *Tomorrow's Song* works exceptionally well here, too. My only gripe is with the techno-style remix of the main theme from Glass's music to Godfrey Reggio's Koyaanisqatsi, 'Lift Off', which rounds off the disc and whose title made me wonder whether Meijer was indeed aware of the striking way in which Glass's theme is used at the very end of this film.

Pwyll ap Siôn

## Peter Eötvös

The Hungarian composer's works, rooted in contemporary social issues, combine tradition and innovation, writes **Arnold Whittall** 

Bartók (b1881) and Kodály (b1882); Ligeti (b1923) and György Kurtág (b1926): on that basis, tidy-minded music historians might have confidently predicted that the next pair of internationally celebrated Hungarian composers would be born during the 1960s, coming to prominence in the 1990s. Instead, the turn of the millennium saw no obvious challenges to the still-active dominance of Ligeti and Kurtág – and understandably so, given the resourcefulness of their distinctive versions of a 'late' modernism whose roots in composers such as Bartók and Berg had proved remarkably productive. In 2001, the second edition of *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* dutifully identified in its 'Hungary' entry 'the generation that became established in the 1970s', and was moving closer 'to both the older and newer avant-garde trends'; within this group we find the name of Peter Eötvös.

Eötvös was born in 1944, and until the 1990s he was best known internationally as a conductor specialising in the music of such challenging composers as Stockhausen, Boulez and Birtwistle. From his Kodály-encouraged student years in Hungary he had combined conducting with composition, but a move to Germany in the late 1960s brought contact with Stockhausen. The electronic studio at West German Radio was supporting the evolution of Stockhausen's most radical compositions, and Eötvös's involvement in Stockhausen's ensemble as technician and performer (1968-76) placed him at the creative heart of mid-century European modernism, in Germany and in France.

#### He consistently distances himself from cosmological themes, giving his musical rituals a more immediately human face

He was Boulez's choice as conductor of the inaugural concert at IRCAM (1978), and was the first music director of the Ensemble Intercontemporain (1979-91). His busy schedule included three years as principal guest conductor of the BBC SO (1985-88), while all the time his profile as a composer was gaining strength. It was perhaps the contrast between his early Budapest years at the Comedy Theatre, providing music for films and plays, and his later experiences with Stockhausen's theatrical enterprises (culminating in two of the *Licht* operas in the 1980s) that clarified Eötvös's commitment to the kind of musico-dramatic rituals that have occupied much of his time as a composer – rituals, and themes, that (unlike Stockhausen's, or Ligeti's) have a strongly 'mainstream' aspect to them, especially when as deeply rooted in contemporary social issues as in his operatic version of Tony Kushner's play about Aids, Angels in America (2002-04). It is clear from his early compositions that his Hungarian



Peter Eötvös: a respect for tradition and commitment to innovation

roots, and admiration for Bartók, are by no means irrelevant, and they remain relevant today – in some ways more relevant than the kind of uncompromisingly radical concerns that might be extrapolated from his work as a performer of other composers' music during the 1970s and 1980s.

The scene on CD is usefully set by Kosmos (or Cosmos), a 15-minute work 'for one or two pianos', written in three days at the age of 17 in 1961, which is representative of his aesthetic pragmatism in expressing both respect for tradition (Bartók is quoted) and commitment to innovation. The point about 'one or two pianos' is that the piece can be played on two pianos by two pianists who shift out of phase, coinciding precisely in just two places. The youthful composer called it Kosmos in homage to Yuri Gagarin's pioneering space flight, and although this might appear to lay foundations for a Stockhausen-like obsession with an ultramodern version of 'the music of the spheres', Eötvös has consistently distanced himself from such far-reaching cosmological themes, giving his musical rituals a more immediately human face.

Before exploring this human dimension in his operas, he produced ambitious works such as *Intervalles-intérieurs* (1974, rev 1981) for instrumental quintet and tape, and *Windsequenzen* (1975, rev 2002) for woodwind sextet with tuba, double bass, accordion and percussion. These works (coupled on an excellent BMC disc) are impressive demonstrations of what could be achieved in the 1970s before 'live' electroacoustic techniques and computer technology fundamentally changed the relationship between traditional instrumental sounds and their electronic transformations. Above all, they display a tendency towards the more euphonious and sustained harmonic processes that would have more to do with spectralism's new angles on the basic elements of the harmonic series post-1975.

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#### EÖTVÖS FACTS

Born Odorheiu Secuiesc, Transylvania: January 2, 1944 **Education** Franz Liszt Academy of Music, Budapest Career Early experience as a conductor in Hungary led to working with Stockhausen and Boulez. As well as conducting many of the world's leading orchestras he has taught conducting and composition, setting up the International Eötvös Institute in 1991. Landmarks in composition Kosmos (1961, rev 1999); Intervalles-intérieurs (1974, rev 1981): Three Sisters (1996-97); IMA (2001-02); Angels in America (2002-04); Seven (2006, Patricia Kopatchinskaja's account won Gramophone's Recording of the Year Award in 2013); Love and Other Demons (2007) Eötvös on Eötvös 'Composing and conducting is the selfsame occupation viewed from two sides: one is constructive, creative, the other is performing, re-creative work. My manner of thinking as a composer feeds on my experience as a performer.'

The most obvious continuation of the composer's interest in matters cosmological

can be heard in two pieces: Jet Stream (2002), an extended aria for solo trumpet and orchestra, written for Markus Stockhausen; and Seven (2006), a 'memorial for the Columbia astronauts' for violin and orchestra (2006). Fet Stream might not avoid all of the musical clichés that can easily arise when imagining an instrument as a 'voice', but Seven (already recorded twice) jettisons any tendency to pious restraint in an impassioned outpouring led by the striking effect of one solo violin interacting with six others distributed around the performing space.

The need for – and nature of – lyricism in present-day music's overlapping eras of 'late' modernism and postmodernism is a pressing concern for a composer with Eötvös's particular background and career path, and he has confronted that concern head-on in vocal music - especially opera. IMA (2001-02) is a three-part composition for mixed chorus and orchestra that echoes the glowing gravity of the sound pictures created in Windsequenzen (which Eötvös revised in 2002). IMA ('Prayer') memorialises a vanished continent (Atlantis) by setting enigmatic texts, one of them in a purely phonetic, invented language. This is perhaps the purest and most intense of all Eötvös's vocal rituals: it avoids the austerity and melancholia common in mainstream modernism, radiating a warmth of expression that adds to the mysterious aura of the unconventional texts. Opera, as normally conceived, needs a more conventional text, and in aligning operas with already existing plays or novels, composers commit themselves to the essential hybridity of the genre. Few have succeeded in adding major works to the permanent repertoire over the past halfcentury or so, and three of Eötvös's operas are good examples of the possibilities as well as the problems involved.

With Three Sisters (composed 1996-97), rather than providing an operatic setting of Chekhov that plays it straight, concentrating on its local, late-19th-century Russian atmosphere and location, Eötvös, his librettist Claus H Henneberg, and the Japanese director of the original production in Lyon (1998), Ushio Amagatsu, focused on the plot's ritualised repetitions. The strategy of intensifying distancing is most startlingly realised in the use of three countertenors for the sisters and a bass for the old servant Anfisa. The music is not mock Oriental, however: it has a density that suggests a latter-day transformation of late-Romantic lyricism as passed down from Puccini to Prokofiev and on to Schnittke and Penderecki.

The very different dramatic atmosphere of Angels in America (first performed in Paris in 2004) doesn't require music that drastically changes that overall stylistic context – the guitar-accompanied pop song and the Broadway musical are touched on in passing rather than incorporated wholesale. There is more of an issue with the extent to which the text (often spoken or declaimed) is allowed to dominate, and the best moments are those in which the orchestra contributes something essential to the dramatic effect, participating in dialogue with the voices rather than being purely accompanimental. Angels in America is unashamedly a 'state of the nation' drama, and accusations of aestheticising something horrific and therefore beyond art aren't entirely stilled, though the performers at the premiere did a magnificent job of conveying genuine feeling and avoiding mere schmaltz.

By contrast, Eötvös's version (2007) of Gabriel García Márquez's novel Of Love and Other Demons maintains a more traditional operatic approach to the kind of drama about religious mania and persecution essayed by (among others) Prokofiev and Penderecki during the 20th century. In so rigorously avoiding expressionistic melodramatics, the music heard without the staging in mind – can seem riskily understated. But when performed as persuasively as it is on the Glyndebourne CD, it plays its part in outlining what a viable kind of 21st-century opera might be like. @

#### EXPLORING EÖTVÖS ON DISC

Featuring early and recent works in varying genres



#### Intervalles-intérieurs. Windsequenzen

Michael Svoboda tbn UMZE Chamber Ensemble, Klangforum Wien / Peter Eötvös BMC (10/04)

These substantial instrumental works, the first also

involving pre-recorded tape, are among the composer's most impressive earlier pieces.



#### **Love and Other Demons**

Alison Bell sop Nathan Gunn bar et al Glyndebourne Chorus, LPO / Vladimir Jurowski Glyndebourne (1/14)

A confident and compelling account of this two-act opera, taken from the 2008 world premiere.



#### 'Concertos'

Soloists, Gothenburg SO, BBCSO / Peter Eötvös

Pieces - CAP-KO (2005) for acoustic piano, keyboard and orchestra: Seven (2006) for violin and orchestra:

and Levitation (2007) for two clarinets, accordion and strings - that show Eötvös's imaginative rethinking of the concerto genre.

# Vocal



## Alexandra Coghlan on English music from Westminster Abbey:

'The Anglican choral tradition is shaped and defined as much by its buildings as by its choirs' > REVIEW ON PAGE 72



## Edward Breen salutes the intricacy and flair of 16th-century madrigals:

'There is a beauty and bloom that infuses even the most mournful of texts with a plethora of subtle hues' > REVIEW ON PAGE 81

#### **CPE Bach**

'Der Frühling'

Three Arias, Wq211 H669<sup>a</sup>. Der Frühling, Wq237 H688<sup>a</sup>. Fürsten sind am lebensziele, Wq214 H761<sup>a</sup>. Selma, Wq236 H739<sup>a</sup>. Sinfonia, Wq156 H582. Sonatina, Wq104 H463. Trio Sonata, Wq158 H584

<sup>a</sup>Rupert Charlesworth ten Café Zimmermann Alpha ⊕ ALPHA257 (64' • DDD • T/t)



The ever-inquisitive Café Zimmermann present a crosssection of Carl

Philipp Emanuel Bach's least-known vocal and instrumental chamber music that conveys the mid-18th-century German musical culture's preoccupation with *Empfindsamkeit* – the striving for sentimentalism expressed through refinement. Accordingly, Café Zimmermann's playing is by turns dynamic, precise and beguiling in trio sonatas composed during the mid-1750s in Berlin: the Trio in A minor (Wq156) is like an early classical symphony in miniature, most memorable for the gracefulness of its *Andantino*; the players also create delightful textures in the Largo at the heart of the Trio in B flat (Wq158), in which muted strings alternate pizzicato and col arco passages.

Gentle flutes and lightly punctuating horns are added to the textures supporting harpsichordist Céline Frisch's nimble solos in the Sonatina in D minor (Wq104), probably revised in the mid-1760s, not long after CPE settled in Hamburg. Der Frühling is a song reworked into a chamber cantata in about 1770: its galant élan is appositely rendered in Rupert Charlesworth's mellifluous delivery of Wieland's poetry describing the joys of spring, working in tandem exquisitely with violinists Pablo Valetti and Mauro Lopes Ferreira. Three brief arias might have been written in the late 1730s during CPE's student days in Frankfurt, whereas the mature sophistication of his music in

late-1770s Hamburg is represented by the succinct cantata *Selma*.

Although Alpha's recording is closely miked, Charlesworth's vocal sureness, stylistic finesse and smooth navigation between registers remind me of the youthful Christoph Prégardien – and there's no higher praise in this repertory. **David Vickers** 

#### JS Bach

'Actus tragicus'

Cantatas - No 12, Weinen, Klagen, Sorgen, Zagen; No 106, Gottes Zeit ist die allerbeste Zeit (Actus tragicus); No 131, Aus der Tiefen rufe ich, Herr, zu dir; No 150, Nach dir, Herr, verlanget mich

Vox Luminis / Lionel Meunier Alpha © ALPHA258 (85' • DDD • T/t)



Expectations were understandably high at the prospect of Vox Luminis graduating

into the sphere of the young Bach cutting his teeth. Three of these cantatas represent the composer's earliest choral works (No 150 often considered these days to be the first such essay), of which the great *Christ lag in Todesbanden* (No 4) is the notable absentee here. *Weinen, Klagen*, from Bach's Weimar years, makes up a generous quartet.

These intimate pieces allow Lionel Meunier and his ensemble to exhibit their distinguished Schützian credentials in music both embracing and departing from the motet models Bach inherited from his forebears. Vox Luminis live up to their name with clear, soft textures redolent of 17th-century devotional rhetoric. At their best, such as the range of puckish to sober in the bassoon-orientated lines in No 150, the single voices and instruments constitute a remarkably crystalline landscape. Emotional restraint also offers some earpricking moments: the last movement of Nach dir brings Brahms's reference to the movement in his Fourth Symphony closer

than ever, and the equivalent point in No 131 affectingly accentuates Bach's poignant oboe-writing.

Yet what ultimately frustrates in this recording is the avoidance of muscular engagement at any stage. The music tends to waft, albeit stylishly, as if observing proceedings from a safe distance. This is surely music of visceral as well as meditative moment? The opening of Aus der Tiefen (No 131) is a case in point, where tidy and inert exchanges belie Bach's heartwrenching commentary begging God to lift us out of the depths into the lap of mercy. Likewise this reading of the *Actus tragicus* (No 106) reduces the opening to a bland canvas of pointed objectivity: those bittersweet viols and recorders portray none of the rhythmic elasticity and suspended animation of the finest performances.

The vocal delivery is mixed, especially when exposed to Bach's already demanding coloratura, and it's mainly very straighttoned. The effect can verge on the apologetic, as in a surprisingly retiring 'Ich folge' from No 12. The overall impression is one of music-making that fails to plumb the depths of these wonderful lamentations.

Jonathan Freeman-Attwood

#### Bax · Finzi · Ireland

Bax I sing of a maiden that is makeless. This worldes joie Finzi God is gone up. Let us now praise famous men. Lo, the full, final sacrifice. Magnificat. My lovely one. Welcome sweet and sacred feast Ireland Ex ore innocentium. Greater love hath no man. Te Deum in F The Choir of Westminster Abbey / James O'Donnell with Daniel Cook org Hyperion © CDA68067 (74' • DDD • T)



The Anglican choral tradition is shaped and defined as much by its buildings as by its

choirs. Whether it's St Paul's Cathedral, the Chapel of King's College, Cambridge, or the Chapel Royal, centuries of music have grown from and for these spaces.



'Dynamic, precise and beguiling': Café Zimmermann explore some of CPE Bach's lesser-known works

Westminster Abbey is one building with a long musical legacy but its spacious acoustic is both blessing and curse, as the choir's latest disc makes clear.

Anthems from Finzi, Bax and Ireland should be a natural fit for the Westminster Abbey choir but again and again here it seems as though James O'Donnell's musical choices are dictated by the constraints of the space, rather than evolving organically from the needs of the repertoire itself. Tempos are consistently slow – problematic for lighter, more lyrical works such as Bax's *I sing of a maiden* and Ireland's upper-voices anthem *Ex ore innocentium* – but there's also an unexpected lack of flexibility and flow within these more stately speeds.

Compare the Finzi performances, for example, to those on the 2002 recording from St John's, Cambridge. Both *God is gone up* and the *Magnificat* may have more heft, more gravitas under O'Donnell but the surging attack and sinewy tone of Christopher Robinson's singers is much more thrilling. This disparity is particularly evident in the album's centrepiece – Finzi's expansive *Lo, the full, final sacrifice*. The work's episodic structure begs for distinctively characterised, contrasting sections, yet the Choir of Westminster Abbey remain doggedly consistent, and

much needed rhetorical clarity is lost in this space.

The choir's diffuse tone – breathier in the upper voices than rivals at New College or even King's, Cambridge – is very effective at softer volumes (Ireland's *Greater love* works beautifully) but lacks blade at moments of climax, and some scrappy singing from basses too often gives chords an unfocused foundation on which to build. While it's good to see Bax's comparatively neglected anthems getting some attention, there's little else here that isn't better served on the rich variety of existing recordings. Alexandra Coghlan *Finzi – selected comparison:* 

Ch of St John's Coll, Cambridge, Robinson (12/02) (NAXO) 8 555792

#### Cherubini · Plantade

Cherubini Requiem à la mémoire de Louis XVI Plantade Messe des morts à la mémoire de Marie-Antoinette

Le Concert Spirituel / Hervé Niquet Alpha © ALPHA251 (69' • DDD • T/t)



Hervé Niquet brings together two posthumous tributes to Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette for the first time in a recording made in the Chapelle Royale at Versailles, rather than the Basilique de Saint-Denis where in 1815 they were finally laid to rest. On that occasion only Cherubini's C minor Requiem was performed. Making its recording debut here is Charles-Henri Plantade's Requiem, performed at another service in 1823 marking the 30th anniversary of the queen's death. On first rehearing the Plantade, Niquet tellingly observed: 'Plantade wrote a work brimming over with emotion...but also one of ineffable gentleness, unspeakable brutality and respectful sweetness, which left us speechless after the final chords.'

Both works cast fascinating reflections on music of the past as well as offering intimations of the future. Cherubini's, specifically commissioned for what was an important state occasion, is monumental in conception, symphonic in style. Neither requires vocal soloists; the Cherubini is scored for SATB whereas the Plantade is for SSTB. The vocal textures in each are mainly homorhythmic and antiphonal, presumably to convey the text more clearly, the retrospective fugal *Kyrie* of the Plantade proving the exception. Cherubini, perhaps in homage to Mozart, gives special prominence to the viola and bassoon while

Plantade artfully substitutes horn for the trumpet of the Last Judgement; both composers – controversially for the time – employ tam-tam (gong) to chilling effect.

The Cherubini has been recorded many times (Toscanini and Giulini in the 1950s. Muti in 1982); the first period recording, sublime, by Boston Baroque under Martin Pearlman, appeared in 2007. Niquet brings fresh artistry and specifically French authority honed over decades with Le Concert Spirituel to both works. For me, this is a prize-winning disc. Julie Anne Sadie

#### Dove

An Airmail Letter from Mozarta. For an Unknown Soldierb

<sup>b</sup>Nicky Spence ten <sup>b</sup>Portsmouth Grammar School Chamber Choir; bOxford Bach Choir; bchildren's choirs of The Minster Junior School, Monks Orchard Primary School & Ecclesbourne Primary School; London Mozart Players /  ${}^{\mathrm{b}}$ Nicholas Cleobury,  ${}^{\mathrm{a}}$ Melvyn Tan pfSignum (F) SIGCD452 (65' • DDD • T)



Jonathan Dove might be expected to come up with a pragmatic response in

commemorating the First World War, and so it proves with For an Unknown Soldier. On one level, this 50-minute setting of wartime poems is demonstrably in a lineage of British choral works going back to Britten and beyond, though Dove's selection is a resourceful one; not least with the climactic sixth of these nine movements, in which Isaac Rosenberg's 'Dead man's dump' - surely the most visceral of any war poem - gets a charged and cumulative treatment whose sheer immediacy makes possible the final catharsis. Elsewhere, inclusion of Helen Dircks's poignant 'To you in France' or Marian Allen's ruminative 'The wind on the Downs' endow a female perspective which extends the emotional range without obscuring that 'anticipation to acknowledgement' trajectory confirmed by the Wilfred Owen poems framing the whole.

As always with Dove, the vocal writing is finely gauged. Children's choirs merge seamlessly into and out of the Oxford Bach Choir, with Nicky Spence a highly eloquent focal-point and Nicholas Cleobury securing an animated response from the London Mozart Players. Anyone coming to these poems for the first time will be left in little doubt as to their emotional acuity.

The main work is preceded by AnAirmail Letter from Mozart (1993), not so frivolous as the title might suggest in its eight variations on themes from the Divertimento, K287 – arranged to emulate a four-movement 'sinfonietta' throughout which Melvyn Tan charts a lively and whimsical course alongside two horns and string quintet. Recordings and annotations are up to Signum's high standards, making this disc more than just a memento of a major occasion. Richard Whitehouse

#### C Förster · Homilius · Rolle · Stölzel

'Christmas Cantatas'

C Förster Ehre sei Gott in der Höhe Homilius Erhöhet die Tore der Welt Rolle Jauchze, du Tochter Zion. Siehe, Finsternis bedecket das Erdenreich Stölzel Kündlich gross ist das gottselige Geheimnis

Hanna Herfurtner sop Carola Günther contr Georg Poplutz ten Raimonds Spogis bass Cologne Academy / Michael Alexander Willens CPO (F) CPO555 052-2 (68' • DDD • T/t)



One of many useful ways in which the late Peter Williams (the final version of whose

monumentum pro 7SB was reviewed by Lindsay Kemp in the December issue) cut his hero down to size was to place the bounds of historical context around the nature of Bach's 'originality'. Record companies have been slow to present the evidence on record but, as if to order, along comes an album presenting four of the composer's contemporaries in impeccably stylish studio performances.

Our understanding of the well-tilled field which Bach came to plough with such industry is most enhanced by two examples of the least familiar name on the bill, Johann Heinrich Rolle (1716-85, plying his trade in Magdeburg). At first sight and hearing, the eschatological vision naturalistically unfurled to open Siehe, Finsternis bedecket das Erdenreich is hardly fit for the Christmas season unless it be to mark a year of disaster and catastrophe. However dramatic, the invernal storm blows itself out in the opening chorus, leaving the stage clear for soloists to rejoice in differing temperaments. The alto does so with a stately injunction to remember the poor accompanied by a positively Handelian walking bass and pair of obbligato horns. Rolle's gift for a melting melody and sympathy for the alto voice is even more persuasively conveyed in the compassionate sweep of the aria that forms

the counterbalance to general rejoicing in Jauchze, du Tochter Zion.

Elsewhere there is much trumpet-anddrummery of larger energy than expressive force. It can be enjoyed rather than endured thanks to the warm sympathy that infuses both recording and performances with an appropriately festive spirit. Tempos are well judged by Michael Alexander Willens and not too hectic, the chorus is plausibly balanced with instrumental forces at two to a part and the organ and brass present a buttressing force of pleasingly architectural solidity.

You would be hard pressed to guess from the tiny five movements of his six-minute cantata that Stölzel was also the mind behind the broad pathos of the aria formerly attributed to Bach as BWV53, Schlage doch, gewünschte Stunde. The contribution made by Homilius is as quirky as we have learnt to expect from the ongoing series on Carus, including a final chorale with a boldly open cadence. In Ehre sei Gott in der Höhe, Christoph Förster (1693-1745, in Merseburg, latterly itinerant) gives Hanna Herfurtner her chance to show off a secure coloratura technique with strings of pearly semiquavers; she and Carola Günther are the pick of a solid team of soloists. Peter Quantrill

#### Gesualdo

'O dolce mio tesoro' Madrigali a cinque voci, Libro sesto Collegium Vocale Gent / Philippe Herreweghe PHI (E) LPHO24 (65' • DDD • T/t)



Along with the Fifth Book of Madrigals issued alongside it, Gesualdo's Sixth Book

charts the culmination of his stylistic development, its contents likely written over more than a decade. Among notable recent recordings is that of La Compagnia del Madrigale (the successor to La Venexiana), the nearest comparator to this new set from Philippe Herreweghe's Collegium Vocale Gent. Unusually for him (but sensibly in this repertoire), Herreweghe opts for single voices, as he did for Lassus's sacred madrigal cycle Lagrime di San Pietro twenty-odd years ago (Harmonia Mundi, 8/94). Here he adds a lutenist, who participates in just about half of the programme.

Herreweghe's singers are well matched, though lacking the stardust that attended the Lagrime line-up or the fullnesss of timbre of La Compagnia. But they are light on their feet, which suits his approach. His tempos are faster and he lingers less over details; at 65 minutes, he shaves around 10 minutes off La Compagnia's set. This marks him out from Italian groups generally, to say nothing of the mannerist Gesualdo interpretations of Concerto Italiano. One might think that Herreweghe's abbreviated approach clarifies the formal trajectory of individual pieces, but to my mind the opposite is true. Steering a middle course between Rinaldo Alessandrini's deliciously masochistic tooth-pulling and Herreweghe, La Compagnia's more detailed scrutiny allows one to grasp the relationship of sections to the whole, and their greater heft allows them to make more of those wrenching sighs and cries. At its best the beauty of the Collegium's voices is very impressive (try the opening tracks), but passagework and some ends of phrases risk being swallowed up by a slightly resonant acoustic. Herreweghe is too fine an interpreter to pass over, but could it be that Gesualdo's flirtations with catastrophe elude the director's fastidious craftsmanship? Fabrice Fitch

Selected comparison:

Compagnia del Madrigale (10/13) (GLOS) GCD922801

#### Handel

Aure soavi, e liete, HWV84. Cuopre tal volta il cielo, HWV98. Dalla guerra amorosa, HWV102a. Giù nei Tartarei regni, HWV187. Pensieri notturni di Filli: nel dolce dell'oblio, HWV134. Tacete, ohimè, tacete, HWV196. Tu fedel? Tu costante?, HWV171a

Yetzabel Arias Fernandez sop Klaus Mertens bar Amsterdam Baroque Orchestra / Ton Koopman Challenge Classics (© CC72265 (64' • DDD • T/t)



A prime selling point here is the premiere recording of an early version of the soprano

cantata Tu fedel? Tu costante?, HWV171a, unearthed in Ton Koopman's private manuscript collection and authenticated by the American musicologist John Roberts. Probably composed in Florence or Venice in 1706, near the start of Handel's glittering Italian sojourn, the 'new' cantata initially follows the course of the familiar version, HWV171 (with oboe added to the string band), then goes its own way. While the text, a woman's taunting of her rustic Lothario, is the same, the music of this newly discovered version is more wistful, even sorrowful in cast, epitomised by the plangent siciliano aria 'Se Licori, Filli ed io'.

Encouraged by the graceful, animated playing of Koopman's period band, Yetzabel Arias Fernandez deploys her 'straight', slightly mezzo-ish soprano with taste and refinement. If her singing is never less than enjoyable, I rather wish that she'd carried some of the temperament she reveals in the recitatives into the arias. Sharper Italian consonants would have helped; and while Handel's music might suggest an undercurrent of pain, there should surely be a streak of defiance in the final aria, where the woman threatens to find another lover if her philandering Fileno doesn't reform.

The other Italian cantatas on offer, each one a miniature unstaged opera, all give pleasure. That stalwart Baroque bass Klaus Mertens, clean, slightly dry of tone, always musical, vividly limns the cynical or suffering lovers in Dalla guerra amorosa and Cuopre tal volta il cielo - though I don't care for his habit of 'yawning' into sustained notes. Fernandez is spirited and sensitive to mood in Aure soave, e liete, where love, typically in these cantatas, is a malign force, and spars delightedly with recorder in Pensieri notturni, with some deft vodelling en route. All the while the Amsterdam players are a buoyant presence, whether in the energising continuo or the beautifully turned obbligatos from oboe, recorder and solo violins. Richard Wigmore

#### Meyerbeer

'Songs, Vol 2'

À une jeune mere. À Venezia. Ballade dans la comédie Murillo. La barque légère. Chant des Moissonneurs vendéens. Fantaisie. La fille de l'air. Hirtenlied<sup>a</sup>. La Marguerite du poète. La pauvre Louise. Le poète mourant. Près de toi<sup>b</sup>. Die Rosenblätter. Sicilienne (Robert le diable). Soave istante (L'esule di Granata). Sonntagslied. Ständchen. Le voeu pendant l'orage



Released some five years after the first volume, this second Naxos disc of

Meyerbeer songs presents settings of poetry in three different languages. Four are premiere recordings, others are better known, including some already featured on mixed recitals from Thomas Hampson (EMI/Warner, 4/92) and Anne Sofie von Otter (Archiv, 9/01).

The songs themselves don't offer any surprises to anyone familiar with the

composer, occupying a middle ground somewhere between Schubert's Lieder and Rossini's later salon songs. As with the operas, the accompaniments are often more interesting and inventive than the vocal parts – listen for the sparkling writing in the delightful 'La fille de l'air', or the strumming in the Seidl 'Ständchen'.

There's an impressive sweep to the distinctly Schubertian 'Le poète mourant' and there's plenty of charm elsewhere. Meyerbeer generally does everything right; at the same time, though, he doesn't really do anything terribly memorable – depths remain largely unplumbed. 'Hirtenlied' inevitably feels like a poor man's 'Der Hirt auf dem Felsen' (and Naxos's text – online only – is of a different poem to that which Meyerbeer actually set). The engaging 'Près de toi' features an eloquent cello obbligato. 'Soave istante', one of the premieres, could, like a handful of songs on the disc, make an effective encore.

But the composer's cause is not helped here by the performances. Sivan Rotem's tremulous, curdled soprano gives little pleasure, and her French and German are really not acceptable. Jonathan Zak's piano-playing is decent and often sprightly; the instrumental contributions are fine.

Strictly one for Meyerbeer completists, I'd say. Anyone else should turn first to Hampson and von Otter: they show what can be made of this repertoire.

**Hugo Shirley** 

#### Schubert

'Ladies Only - Love and Lament'
Claudine von Villa Bella, D239 - Arietta di
Claudine. Delphine, D857. Ellen's Erster Gesang,
D837. Ellen's Zweiter Gesang, D838. Ellen's
Dritter Gesang, D839. Gretchen am Spinnrade,
D126. Gretchen's Bitte, D564. Iphigenia, D573.
Die junge Nonne, D828. Kolma's Klage, D217.
Lied der Anne Lyle, D830. Rosamunde, D797 Axa's Romanze. Suleika's Erster Gesang, D720.
Suleika's Zweiter Gesang, D717. Viola, D786
Nienke Oostenrijk sop Marianne Boer pf
Cobra © COBRAOO52 (75' • DDD • T)

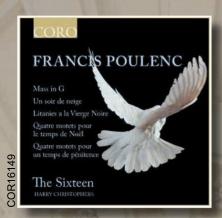


This is a disc I rather wish I weren't reviewing. There's a fine line between

artlessness and blandness in Schubert, and one that Nienke Oostenrijk fails to locate. Time and again I was struck by the gulf between what the Dutch soprano writes in her perceptive booklet-notes (acknowledging a debt to Fischer-Dieskau, Graham Johnson et al) and what I hear. Her shallow, girlish timbre might be

## CORC

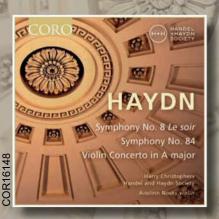
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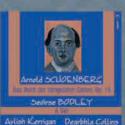
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effective in early music, though I don't care for her habit of starting longer notes 'straight' and then applying vibrato fulsomely. The opening 'Gretchen am Spinnrade' sets the tone. While any singer must convey a measure of innocence and vulnerability, Oostenrijk's extreme of naivety seems simply inadequate. With minimal variety of colour and dynamics, even at the searing final climax, she never remotely suggests Gretchen's confused passion and newly awakened sexuality.

Elsewhere the emotional range veers between mild elation and wan melancholy. As in 'Gretchen', Oostenrijk crucially lacks the reserves of passion and power for the first 'Suleika' song (whose euphoric sustained crescendo goes for nothing) and what should be the immense spiritual struggle of 'Die junge Nonne'. Ellen's three songs from Scott's The Lady of the Lake ripple by guilelessly and unmemorably from both singer and her rhythmically unimaginative pianist. The laments of Kolma and Iphigenia both imply deeper, grander voices than Oostenrijk's; and the best one can say of the excitable love song 'Delphine' is that there's no danger of it suggesting 'an Amazonian onslaught' (Graham Johnson's phrase), as it can do when heavier sopranos tackle it. As to the extended 'floral ballad' 'Viola', a piece that needs the most sensitive handling if it is not to sound coyly monotonous, Oostenrijk's written observations are far more interesting than her colourless singing. Which rather sums it up. Richard Wigmore

#### Schumann

Dichterliebe, Op 48. Fünf Lieder, Op 40. Abends am Strand, Op 45 No 3. Der arme Peter, Op 53 No 3. Belsatzar, Op 57. Dein Angesicht, Op 127 No 2. Es leuchtet meine Liebe, Op 127 No 3. Lehn' deine Wang', Op 142 No 2. Mein Wagen rollet langsam, Op 142 No 4. Tragödie, Op 64 No 3

**Mauro Peter** *ten* **Helmut Deutsch** *pf*Sony Classical © 88985 33849-2 (65' • DDD • T)



The Swiss tenor Mauro Peter has the kind of *Dichterliebe* voice I hear in

my mind's ear: fresh, youthful, evenly produced, with mellifluousness balanced by a touch of metal. He is a sensitive interpreter, too, of Schumann's cycle of first rapture, disenchantment and bittersweet resignation. In symbiotic accord with Helmut Deutsch, Peter phrases with unforced eloquence, pointing salient words within a liquid legato. His diction is a model, both expressive and crystal clear. With no hint of mawkishness, he excels in wondering or regretful tenderness and Schumannesque *Innigkeit*.

While Peter's shy understatement, and his gift of simplicity, bring their rewards, I would have welcomed a stronger infusion of Heine-esque bitterness at what should be the shocking end of No 8 ('Zerrissen mir das Herz'). The more highly strung Peter Schreier and Ian Bostridge are both far more vivid here. And Mauro Peter is not the only tenor to sound stretched by the low tessitura of 'Im Rhein' (which needs more variety of dynamics and colour) and 'Ich grolle nicht'. That said, he adds a welcome edge to his tone in the caustically lumpen 'Ein Jüngling liebt' ein Mädchen', and finds just the right anxious colouring for the funereal dream song, 'Ich hab' im Traum geweinet' (No 13). Like so many other pianists, Deutsch consistently shortens the rests between the keyboard's drumbeats here. They sound that much more portentous when precisely observed.

Complementing Dichterliebe is a clutch of other Heine settings, including four songs that Schumann discarded from the cycle before publication. Peter underplays the phantasmagoric eeriness that some performers find beneath the amiable surface of 'Mein Wagen rollet langsam', though his musing inwardness is effective enough, both here and in 'Dein Angesicht', where the chaste fervour of Schumann's melody cuts against the grain of Heine's ominous words. In the ballad 'Belsatzar' he compensates for his limited dynamic range with incisive diction and an urgent sense of drama. Peter is persuasive, too, in the five Op 40 Andersen vignettes: airy and dulcet in the tiny framing numbers, and finely gauging the disquieting or (in the proto-Mahlerian funeral march 'Der Soldat') tragic moods of the three central songs. The ghastly twist at the end of the lullaby 'Muttertraum' is pointed without melodrama. All the while Helmut Deutsch is a scrupulous and discerning pianist-partner ('accompanist' won't do here), not least in his immaculate sifting and balancing of Schumann's fragile, fleeting melodic strands. There is a worthwhile note, though Sony shows scant regard for the Anglophone market by stinting on translations.

#### Richard Wigmore

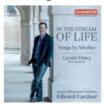
Dichterliebe – selected comparisons: Schreier, Eschenbach (6/91<sup>R</sup>) (TELD) 4509 97960-2 Bostridge, Drake (4/98) (EMI/WARN) 556575-2

#### **Sibelius**

'In the Stream of Life'

Come away, Death, Op 60 No 1ª. The Diamond on the March Snow, Op 36 No 6ª. Duke Magnus, Op 57 No 6ª. Hymn to Thaïsª. In the Night, Op 38 No 3ª. In the Stream of Life (orch Rautavaara)ª. The Oceanides, Op 73. On a Balcony by the Sea, Op 38 No 2ª. Pohjola's Daughter, Op 49. The Rapids-Shooter's Brides, Op 33ª. Romance, Op 42

<sup>a</sup>Gerald Finley bass-bar



Even in the Englishspeaking world, where Sibelius has mostly enjoyed a high

reputation, his vocal music remains undervalued. The language barrier hasn't helped, nor has his ungrateful pianowriting. Sibelius's art song accompaniments habitually imply fuller textures yet he himself scored relatively few for larger forces, posing problems of authenticity for determined advocates like Gerald Finley. I can't recall a high-profile disc of orchestrally accompanied Sibelius songs since that of Soile Isokoski (Ondine, 7/06) and you have to look back to the mid-Nineties for a similar miscellany featuring a male soloist: Jorma Hynninen, again with Leif Segerstam directing for the same label. Although Hynninen enjoyed a long association with the late Einojuhani Rautavaara, it was for the Canadian's similarly focused albeit less insistently heroic bass-baritone that the composer orchestrated seven Sibelius songs in the slipstream of his own Omar Khayyám cycle, Rubáiyát. The booklet contains a tribute from Finley reviewing their lateblooming friendship. Odd, then, that its cover makes no mention of Rautavaara's involvement, despite applying the title of his Sibelius selection, In the Stream of Life, to the album as a whole.

In making his choices Rautavaara seems to have wanted to reflect Sibelius's broad stylistic range from full-blooded Romanticism to gnomic modernism. The languages set are various too: German and Finnish as well as Swedish. In the opening 'Die stille Stadt' ('The Silent City'), where Segerstam as orchestrator felt the need to vary the string textures, Rautavaara provides a continuous quasi-mystical sheen, the undulations allocated to clarinet and flute rather than harp, the surface discreetly flecked with glockenspiel. The sequence calls for a relatively small orchestra with enthusiastic timpanist.

#### GRAMOPHONE Collector

### THE FULL MONTEVERDI

lain FenIon examines a variety of approaches to the music of Monteverdi and his contemporaries



'Simply stunning': Cappella Mediterranea take us on a Monteverdian roller-coaster

rained at the cathedral in provincial Cremona, Monteverdi was just 17 when he published his book of three-voice canzonette. Designed for the domestic market of amateur performers, its light and airy contents are presented now by Armoniosoincanto in versions elaborated by a constantly changing palette of added instruments. Historically legitimate, this approach also brings necessary variety to these rather slight pieces that stylistically bear few signs of the Monteverdi to come. The cast of female singers produce a well-balanced sound, attractively bright in the upper registers. More controversial perhaps is Francio Radicchia's interpretational style, at times verging on the romantic, which leads to an overblown effect.

The 450th anniversary of Monteverdi's death is certain to bring a wealth of performances of his better-known works in 2017. As a clutch of recent recordings suggests, we can also look forward to some interesting explorations of the music of his less familiar contemporaries. To say that Amante Franzoni was a Monteverdian is to put it mildly. In Mantua, where Monteverdi served the ruling Gonzaga family for the first half of his career, they must have known each other. And when Franzoni was appointed to direct the choir of the ducal chapel of Santa Barbara there in 1612, he evidently became totally fascinated by Monteverdi's sacred music in

general, and by the 1610 Mass and Vespers in particular. For the present recording, Francesco Moi has drawn upon two collections of Franzoni's music including the Vespers psalms of 1619 in order to create a varied liturgical sequence that resonates strongly with the influence of Monteverdi's prototype, as well as paying debts to other composers and, above all, to the Venetian tradition of polychoral music. There is even a Sonata sopra Sancta Maria which, like Monteverdi's setting, pits the cantus firmus intonation 'Sancta Maria ora pro nobis' against the richly textured accompaniment of four trombones. The playing of the Concerto Palatino, who come into their own in two instrumental canzoni, is one of the highlights of the recording; there is also some sensitively crafted solo singing, such as the opening of 'Duo seraphim', where two soprano voices create a bright effect like the pealing of bells in reponse to the words 'Sanctus Dominus Deus Saboath'. The interior spaces of Santa Barbara are fully exploited to good effect, and the different areas from the apse to the gallery at the west end clearly differentiated on this imaginative recreation.

Marc'Antonio Mazzone is an even more obscure figure. References in his printed collections suggest strong connections with aristocratic patrons in Naples, but he lived and probably died in Venice. There are also occasional signs of contacts

with Mantua. Il primo libro delle canzoni a quattro voci, recorded here for the first time, is dedicated to Monteverdi's patron and employer Vincenzo Gonzaga, Duke of Mantua. There is even a foretaste of Monteverdi's famous dictum that the words should be 'the mistress of the harmony' in Mazzone's prefatory remark that 'the body of music is the notes, and the words are the soul'. But there the similarities end. Mazzone's canzoni are essentially dance songs constructed around simple points of imitation, characterised by strong and lively rhythms. Rather like Armoniosoincanto, the Ensemble Le Vaghe Ninfe respond to the original partbooks, which set out the canzoni as fully texted vocal music, by adding instruments, in this case an even richer assortment including Baroque guitar, percussion, serpent and trombone. It is doubtful whether the lid of any 16th-century Italian music chest could have been lifted to reveal such an array of possibilities, but the priority here is clearly to entertain; the result is a sequence that somewhat restlessly exploits many different combinations of voices and instruments. Yet further variety is secured by unscripted instrumental elaborations, while in seven cases the texts are declaimed by the actor and musician Vincenzo Failla. The sound world of 16th-century Italian music-making at home this is not, but does it matter?

Paul Van Nevel and the **Huelgas Ensemble** confront Monteverdi's *Missa in* 

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illo tempore, conservative to the point of anonymity, with four madrigals written in more progressive styles and published decades before Monteverdi's Mass was composed. This ingenious and thoughtprovoking juxtaposition, which effectively inverts the norms of chronology and style, is a reminder of the complex strands of musical composition in the decades around 1600; the programming is characteristic of Van Nevel's approach. Only one of the madrigals, Luca Marenzio's setting of Petrarch's 'Solo e pensoso', has really entered the performing repertory; the readings of the remaining three, by Vicentino, Tudino and the greatly undervalued Giaches de Wert, are quite simply revelatory in their exposure of highly wrought experimental techniques. When it comes to music of this period, the Huelgas Ensemble are old hands, with a string of awards to their name; enthusiasts will not be disappointed.

On the final disc in this batch, also structured in a novel and inventive way, the Cappella Mediterranea offer 14 pieces by Monteverdi, chosen to represent the Seven Deadly Sins paired with the Seven Heavenly Virtues. The selection, which ranges from madrigals to extracts from the late Venetian operas, is presented in Leonardo García Alarcón's familiar textually driven manner, with every poetic nuance exploited to maximum musical effect. From the opening scene from L'incoronazione di Poppea, with its snappy rhythms and urgent treatment of the genere concitato, to the final madrigal 'Altri canti d'amor', with its surprisingly tender opening, this is a roller-coaster emotional ride at the highest level of interpretative and technical skill. This is simply stunning. 6

#### THE RECORDINGS



**Monteverdi** Canzonette a tre voci **Armoniosoincanto** Brilliant Classics ® 95348



**Franzoni** Vespers **Concerto Palatino / Moi** Brilliant Classics **(B)** 95344



**Mazzone** Canzoni, Libro primo **Ensemble Le Vaghe Ninfe** Brilliant Classics ® 95416



**Monteverdi** Missa in illo tempore, etc **Huelgas Ensemble / Van Nevel** DHM **(F)** 88875 14348-5



**Monteverdi** I 7 Peccati Capitali **Cappella Mediterranea / Alarcón** Alpha (P. ALPHA249 Winningly sung as it is, the familiar climactic number, 'Svarta rosor' ('Black Roses'), struck me as underdressed.

Finley appends a further seven songs, arranged by other hands. The 'Hymn to Thaïs' is the most obscure. Devised in 1909, reconstructed in 1945 and rededicated to Aulikki Rautawaara (sic), the composer's cousin, it is given in its original English. More musically significant highlights include 'Kom nu hit, död' ('Come away, Death'), in the 'white dwarf' string arrangement on which Sibelius was supposedly working at the very end of his life, and the epic Finnish-language 'Koskenlaskijan morsiamet' (awkwardly translated as 'The Rapids-Shooter's Brides'), which he composed half a century earlier at the time of the Lemminkäinen Suite. Both performances come off well, without trumping the natural articulation and jet-black tautness of Hynninen with Jorma Panula in Gothenburg (BIS, 11/85).

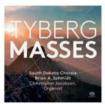
There are also three purely orchestral pieces. Gardner and the orchestra kick off proceedings with an impressionistic account of Pohjola's Daughter, its narrative characterised by fine detail as much as unrelenting forward drive, woodwind naturally placed rather than spotlit. The Romance for strings makes an attractive interlude, pressed into service between thematically related songs. Likewise the more volatile Oceanides. While Osmo Vänskä (BIS, 9/02) may be more successful in showing how Sibelius's water music constantly transforms itself, every eddy and current climaxing at subtly different points, Gardner's softer grain is persuasive too, enhancing this impressive if idiosyncratic programme.

David Gutman

#### **Tyberg**

Masses - No 1; No 2

South Dakota Chorale / Brian A Schmidt with Christopher Jacobson org



When the Jewish Austrian composer Marcel Tyberg was arrested by the

Gestapo at his Italian home in 1944 it did not come as a shock. Concerned for the safety of his music, Tyberg had already entrusted his scores to a friend, Dr Milan Mihich. Tyberg himself died in Auschwitz later that year but his music survived, and in the 1980s began to re-emerge in America, thanks to the efforts of Mihich's son, now in possession of the manuscripts.

Two of Tyberg's symphonies as well as some chamber works have already been recorded by the Buffalo Philharmonic and JoAnn Falletta (Naxos, A/13), and now it's the turn of two of Tyberg's Masses, recorded here for the first time by the South Dakota Chorale.

Where Tyberg's symphonies are bittersweet affairs, charged with post-Romantic angst and occasional flashes of Shostakovich-like violence, his Masses are more nostalgic, fitting squarely into the Romantic Austro-Germanic mould of Bruckner and Rheinberger. Both Tyberg's Masses, No 1 in G and No 2 in F, are grand, festal works, large on impact and low on intricacy. Unisons and choral homophony dominate, broken up by the occasional fugal episode.

An unexpectedly delicate choral Benedictus is the highlight of the Mass in G, as well as the charged opening mezzo solo of the sombre Agnus Dei (eternal peace, for Tyberg, is by no means a guarantee), and both 'Hosannas' are climactic affairs, well served here by organist Christopher Jackson and the organ of the First-Plymouth Congregational Church in Lincoln, Nebraska. The more emotionally expansive Mass in F is the more appealing work, lively with melodic invention, though still lacking the distinctive voice of the symphonies. The episodic Gloria, with its solo interjections and ensembles, is strikingly dramatic, and the lulling Sanctus gently attractive.

Directed by Brian A Schmidt, the South Dakota Chorale give exemplary performances – full-toned, carefully balanced and with just enough spin on the sound to keep the unisons interesting. Whether, however, it will be enough to persuade other ensembles to follow suit and explore Tyberg's functional but oddly anonymous choral works remains to be seen. Alexandra Coghlan

#### 'All Who Wander'

G

**Dvořák** Gypsy Songs, Op 55 B104 **Mahler** Rückert-Lieder. Erinnerung. Ich ging mit Lust. Scheiden und Meiden **Sibelius** A Kiss's Hope, Op 13 No 2. Six Songs, Op 36 - No 1, Black Roses; No 4, Sigh, sedges, sigh; No 5, March Song. Five Songs, Op 37 - No 4, Was it a dream?; No 5. The Maiden

Jamie Barton mez Brian Zeger pf Delos © DE3494 (61' • DDD • T/t)



Anyone who watched Jamie Barton sail serenely to victory at 2013's Cardiff Singer of the World competition will know what a fine singer she is. This debut recital from Delos only underlines the fact. The voice is rich, generous and vibrant, big but beautifully controlled, impeccably smooth throughout its range. It's the sort of instrument you could listen to all day, in any sort of repertoire. She's an intelligent, sensitive musician too, and evidently a good programme-builder, here offering Dvořák and Sibelius to complement her Mahler.

It's all extremely impressive, even if in her Mahler she doesn't quite offer the interpretative complexity one hears elsewhere in the catalogue. As she continues along her career she'll no doubt find more depth in 'Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen', for example, and she slightly overdoes, to my ear, the repeated 'cht' sounds in 'Um Mitternacht'. But as singing it's beyond reproach (she tosses off the repeated 'Ades' in 'Scheiden und Meiden' with Valkyrian confidence), and with each listen I grew more and more to appreciate her straight-down-the-line interpretative approach.

Her *Gypsy Songs* are big and generous, backed up by lively, rich and resonant accompaniments from Brian Zeger. The disc's highlight, though, is the Sibelius, in which the mezzo pours her heart into grand, soaring accounts of some of the composer's most seductive songs. The first pair from Op 36 are magnificent, but then the amplitude and tonal generosity Barton unleashes in 'Flicksan kom', including a fearsome chest voice in the final bars, and the concluding 'Var det en dröm' are overwhelming. This really is an exciting talent, and a terrific disc. **Hugo Shirley** 

#### 'Distant Light'

Barber Knoxville: Summer of 1915, Op 24
Björk All is Full of Love. Jóga. Virus (all arr
Hans Eck) Hillborg The Strand Settings
Renée Fleming sop Royal Stockholm
Philharmonic Orchestra / Sakari Oramo
Decca © 483 O415DH (48' • DDD • T)
Digital bonus track: Björk Undo



The disc's charismatic title comes from a line in the first song of *The Strand Settings* –

evocative in its way, but not something that prepares you for the music that follows. No matter. There's no wrong reason to lure listeners into Anders Hillborg's four-song cycle, which was premiered by Fleming with the New York Philharmonic

in 2013 to the sort of instant acclaim that greeted Peter Lieberson's *Neruda Songs* (for Lorraine Hunt Lieberson) and Hans Abrahamsen's *let me tell you* (for Barbara Hannigan). All three pieces share a complete sureness in their respective musical identities – no gimmicky effects, no quotations from the past, just going to the poetic essence of the text at hand.

Drawn from poet Mark Strand's meditations on grief, *The Strand Settings* share a Nordic spareness with late Sibelius but use that manner in personal, candid ways that examine the pain of abandonment with resignation rather than histrionics, reaching beyond mere heartbreak and into existential crisis. Some moments have cinematic shifts in instrumental colour as the words veer between imagination and hallucination, and go from night-time darkness to bleach-out sunlight.

But what sets The Strand Settings temperamentally apart from Hillborg's also lyrical ...lontana in sonno... (2002) is the third song, which lands in the angular, rhythmically vital world of Stravinsky's Symphony in Three Movements and then morphs into hybrid jazz for Strand's poetic evocations of street prostitutes described as soiled angels. But it's here that the cycle courageously explores the hormonal overdrive that's a side effect of grief - and where it can take you. The fourth song's nostalgia completes the dramatic arc, as much as such matters can ever be resolved. Fleming is in her best voice for Hillborg, sometimes digging into her lower range with great effect but also resorting to breathy mannerisms to characterise awed disbelief at the visions at hand. As with later Elisabeth Schwarzkopf recordings, though, the mannerisms are undeniably effective.

The question is how to build a full compact disc programme around *The Strand Settings*. Barber's *Knoxville*, with James Agee's literal descriptions of pre-First World War America, is awfully quaint in comparison – not helped by Fleming's middling interpretative commitment. Most *Knoxville* performances either draw from dignified Eleanor Steber or conversational Leontyne Price. Fleming is definitely from the former camp, partly due to the tone-heavy nature of her voice. I missed hearing more of the words and Sakari Oramo's skilful use of sonority in the Hillborg.

With Nordic genes in common, Björk songs might seem to be a more natural fit. But she is mostly a miniaturist, while Hillborg is anything but. Intentionally, I avoided comparing Fleming's performances with Björk's if only because Fleming has to make sense on her own terms. 'Virus' is a bit calculated and emotionally inauthentic. But Fleming finds much to connect with in the rhapsodic repetitions of 'Jóga'. 'All is Full of Love' benefits from overdubbing: Fleming seems to be everywhere at once, with rather intoxicated effect. The digital bonus track, 'Undo', with its expansively repeated lyrics 'It's not meant to be a struggle uphill', has Fleming adopting Björk's splintered approach toward words; surprisingly, it sits more readily alongside Hillborg. As a collection of music, this haphazard disc asks if Hillborg, alone, is worth the price. Yes it is.

#### **David Patrick Stearns**

See the feature on Anders Hillborg on page 22

#### 'Heracleitus'

Butterworth When the lad for longing sighs. Bredon Hill. On the Idle Hill of Summer. With rue my heart is laden. Fill a glass with golden wine. On the Way to Kew. Suite for String Quartet Gurney Ludlow and Teme. Adagio. The Cloths of Heaven. Severn Meadows. By a Bierside Warlock Heracleitus. Sweet Content Charles Daniels ten Michael Dussek pf The Bridge Quartet EM Records (\*P. EMRCDO36 (75' • DDD • T)



The latest release from the admirable English Music Festival's in-house

label is a recital of songs and chamber music by Gurney, Warlock and Butterworth. And whatever your feelings about Butterworth's songs being plucked out of their published contexts like this, it does add up to a thoughtful and satisfying programme, discreetly drawing out the music's shared strands of memory, folklore and loss.

Four pieces are billed here as 'world premiere recordings'. The two Warlock songs aren't that exactly; these are reconstructions (by John Mitchell) of Warlock's own lost arrangements for string quartet and voice. Butterworth's Suite, however, is the real thing. The Bridge Quartet's unaffected playing and oaky, wide-grained tone fits it beautifully, and serves Butterworth's folk-flavoured inspirations infinitely better than the misguided recent account on BIS with full string orchestra (8/16). The Bridges unfold Gurney's poignant, rather discursive Adagio for string quartet with quiet tenderness: it is hard to believe that neither of these



Gerald Finley and Edward Gardner in the control room during the recording sessions for their Sibelius disc on Chandos (review on page 77)

pieces has been recorded in its original form until now.

The naturalness of the quartet's sound is an attractive feature of Gurney's Ludlow and Teme, as is Michael Dussek's warm and responsive piano-playing. Charles Daniels, though, isn't always easy on the ear; his is what you might call an Oxbridge-sounding tenor, with a tendency to tighten and then flare in the top register. He doesn't really efface memories of Adrian Thompson in this repertoire on Hyperion, though EM's recorded sound is more lucid. Those four rarities, however, give ample reason to enjoy this disc. Richard Bratby Ludlow and Teme – selected comparison:

Ludlow and 1eme – selected comparison: Thompson, Delme Qt (9/90<sup>R</sup>) (HYPE) CDH55187

#### 'Madrigali diminuti'

Anonymous Pacientia ognom mi dice.
Padouana della Ragioni. Padouana
La Ternarina. Se a vostra voglia
De Barberis Fantasia sopra se mai
provasti. Madonna qual certezza
Lurano Aldi donna non dormire
Tromboncino Nunqua fu pena magiore
Verdelot Ardenti miei sospiri. Donna che
sete tra le belle bella. Dormendo un giorno.
Igno soave. In me cresci l'ardore.
Madonna qual certezza. Tutto il di piango

**Doulce Mémoire / Denis Raisin Dadre** rec Ricercar (F) RIC371 (67' • DDD • T/t)



Like so many 16th-century instrumental tutors, Sylvestro Ganassi's

La Fontegara (1535) begins by stating that all musical instruments are inferior to the human voice before explaining that instruments can imitate vocal expression through varying breath-pressure and shading of tone. On this new disc of madrigals by Philippe Verdelot and contemporaries, Denis Raisin Dadre applies La Fontegara's rules to the very repertoire that Ganassi himself practised, the madrigals of Philippe Verdelot and contemporary works.

Having established the superiority of the voice, it is fitting that soprano Clara Coutouly sings so engagingly throughout this programme. Her warm tone has a beauty and bloom that infuses even the most mournful of texts with a plethora of subtle hues. In Verdelot's *Ardenti miei sospiri*, for example, she leans into those soft onomatopoeic sighs with heart-

rending subtlety. Dadre's recorder-playing steps up to this mark with great panache, displaying his impressive versatility; but, ironically, in doing so he also proves that Ganassi had a good point about voices, for what Coutouly does with tone – the darker hues in particular – she can do without affecting pitch. Again, *Ardenti miei sospiri* offers a useful example since pitch drifts noticeably during the first two notes of the opening recorder phrase.

But this is a disc that also champions Ganassi's extremely virtuoso style of ornamentation, and here Dadre is a supremely impressive artist. In fact, the whole Doulce Mémoire team play with a stylish fluency that negotiates various staggeringly intricate manoeuvres with wonderful flair. I particularly enjoyed their instrumental version of Verdelot's *Igno soave* which, when cross-referenced with their previous vocal performance ('Le siècle du Titien' – Naïve) shows what an exciting ensemble they are.

**Edward Breen** 

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## REISSUES

**Richard Osborne** on an invigorating Toscanini set and **Rob Cowan** revisits the best of David Oistrakh

## The 'essential' Toscanini

rturo Toscanini's association with the gramophone and his long-time record company, RCA Victor, began in Camden, New Jersey in the winter of 1920-21. From the gramophone's point of view, it was love at first sight, such was the purity and beauty of sound any Toscanini-trained orchestra presented to the microphones. Record collectors also loved the results. Shorn of mannerism, and possessed of an electric charge that appeared to re-ignite at every near hearing, Toscanini's recordings bore repetition better than most.

He himself was rather more wary. Indeed, it would take him the best part of 15 years to learn to trust the gramophone: a compact that was finally sealed in 1936, his last as Music Director of the New York Philharmonic, and a vintage year for Toscanini recordings. These include an account of Beethoven's Seventh Symphony that has never been surpassed and a recording of Rossini's Semiramide Overture which in 1942 the young Herbert von Karajan presented to Ernst von Siemens, the new owner of Deutsche Grammophon, as the ideal, musically and technically, of what a gramophone record should be.

Twenty-five years have passed since RCA released its monumental 'Arturo Toscanini: The Complete RCA Recordings'. That set has now been withdrawn, replaced by the new 20-CD distillation which on this triple anniversary (Toscanini's birth in 1867, the founding of the NBC SO in 1937, Toscanini's death in 1957) is an excellent vade mecum for downsizers and new collectors alike. Curated by Harvey Sachs and the late Christopher Dyment, it is bold enough to make room for complete recordings of three operas with which Toscanini was intimately associated - Otello, Falstaff and La bohème - while managing to give as plausible an overview of Toscanini's recorded legacy as the remaining 14 CDs allow.

Haydn leads the collection with the famous 1929 New York PO recording of the Clock Symphony and a fine 1945 NBC recording of Symphony No 98 which was something of a rarity in its day. Both performances show Toscanini's relish for Haydn's music. If he blushed to admit that he found less interest in Mozart's symphonic output, he was nonetheless a whizz with the Haffner, one of the most Haydnesque of Mozart's symphonies, and, it turns out, with the *Jupiter* which he recorded with the NBC SO in 1945-46. In Ward Marston's fine new transfer, the performance rises from the grave of the original Victor 78s to reveal a wonderfully fiery reading, at the heart of which lies a ravishingly beautiful account of the slow movement.

The year Toscanini left La Scala, Milan, 1929, was a turning-point; for the remaining 25 years of his career he was primarily known as an orchestral conductor, a Beethoven conductor in particular. Nowadays this is a tricky subject, given that for a multitude of reasons the legacy is something of a mixed bag, veering between the sublime (the 1936 New York Seventh) and the lurid (the 1939 NBC Ninth, Music & Arts, 4/14). Certainly, I'm baffled to find Toscanini's 1939 RCA recording of the Fifth Symphony in this anthology of 'essential' recordings. In some respects, it's similar to Furtwängler's enduringly satisfying 1937 Berlin Philharmonic Fifth (HMV, 1/38<sup>R</sup>) but the NBC SO was no Berlin Philharmonic, as is clear from the many moments of unwanted aggression. The 1951 Beethoven Fourth Symphony is a more plausible choice, if only because - like the joyous account of Beethoven's Septet, sadly not included here - it subverts the theory that Toscanini became more sclerotic with age.

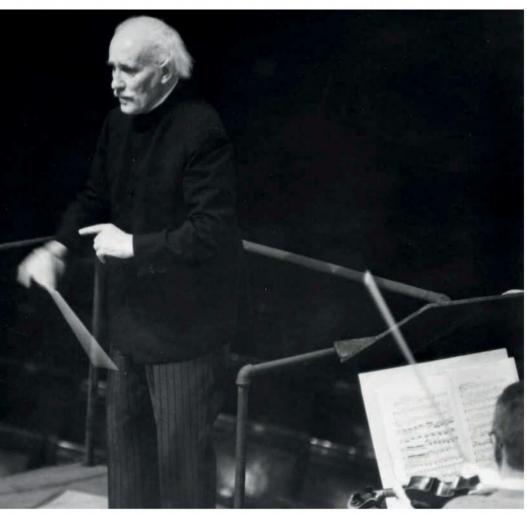
The point is further underlined by the inclusion of Toscanini's wonderful 1952 NBC account of Brahms's Second Symphony, a performance which catches



as well as any on record the *bel canto* beauty of Brahms's writing and the traumas which threaten to destroy the idyll from within.

Some of the most vivid and historically important performances are of what for Toscanini was new music. His conducting of Debussy's La mer was thought incomparable in its day. (The 1942 Philadelphia account, arguably the most atmospheric of his several recordings, has been chosen here.) He fell out with Strauss over the rights to the Italian prima of Salome but if this 1939 NBC performance of the Dance of the Seven Veils is anything to go by, he never fell out of love with the music. It's joined by his famously electrifying 1951 recording of Don Juan and an equally revered Death and Transfiguration from the following year.

Also on the same disc is Sibelius's *Pohjola's Daughter*, a remarkable performance taken from an all-Sibelius concert in December



Arturo Toscanini's 150th birthday is marked by a new 20-CD box-set of 'essential' recordings

1940. Toscanini's contemporary and friend Zoltán Kodály is also honoured with a recording of the *Háry János* suite which manages to be both vibrant and, in 'Song', deeply lyrical. This comes immediately after Respighi's *Roman Festivals* which, inexplicably, has been preferred to *Fountains* or *Pines*. True, Toscanini conducted the work's prima; but it's a dreadful piece of musical rodomontade that no one in their right mind would want to hear twice.

You probably need to be a particular kind of Toscanini fan to take much satisfaction from his recordings of Schubert's *Great* C major or Schumann's *Rhenish* symphonies, especially as this least *gemütlich* of maestros is working with non-European orchestras. By contrast, his 1947 New York account of Tchaikovsky's *Pathétique* is something other. I suspect Tchaikovsky would have been moved and gratified by so classicising a reading, one that resolutely refuses to tear a passion to tatters.

Much the same can be said of Toscanini's 50th anniversary performance of Puccini's *La bohème*, whose prima he conducted in Turin in 1896. Here is a performance that keeps sentimentality firmly at bay. There

have been more vocally alluring casts on record – was there ever a more virginal-sounding Musetta? – but the Mimì, Licia Albanese, is superb. Hers was an elusive art (on record at least) and this a fine memento of it. Toscanini sings a good deal, an effect I find strangely moving.

A good wine needs no bush and nor do Toscanini's complete recordings of *Otello* and *Falstaff* (the latter reproduced in markedly warmer sound than previously). His concert performance of Act 3 of *Rigoletto* – Toscanini (and Verdi) at their most elemental – is here, as is his 1952 Carnegie Hall recording of Act 2 of Gluck's *Orfeo ed Euridice*, a work much loved by him. A classicist at heart, with a classicist's sense of things both luminous and daemonic, he was clearly an exceptional interpreter of the piece.

The set does well to remind us that Toscanini was a revered Wagnerian. Even the faithful of Bayreuth thought as much. The second of two discs devoted to Wagner is full of good things, notably Dawn and Siegfried's Rhine Journey in a vintage 1936 NYPO recording and the Immolation Scene from *Götterdämmerung* (of which

Toscanini conducted the first Italian production in 1895), recorded with Helen Traubel in 1941. This is one of the greatest of all recordings of the scene, the more remarkable for sounding more like the climax to the entire cycle rather than a mere bleeding chunk. The final scene of Act 1 of *Die Walküre* featuring Traubel and Lauritz Melchior also has its interest.

The other Wagner disc is far from 'essential'. It includes an unexceptionable account of the *Siegfried Idyll* and a performance of the Prelude to *Die Meistersinger* that is light years away from the one we hear on the complete and lovingly restored 1937 Salzburg Festival *Die Meistersinger* (Andante, A/03 – nla). The timings are identical but what in New York sounds brazen and unyielding in Salzburg has a steady, *bürgerlich* gait, the Vienna Philharmonic winds tumbling one over another like otters in a river, the whole thing filled with a profound sense of human well-being.

All in all, I found myself excited, delighted or instructed by around 80 per cent of the choices here. I got little pleasure from some of the fillers, including three Weber overtures whose 27 minutes could have usefully been given over to more Berlioz, whose music Toscanini conducted with rare virtuosity and allure. I would not have hesitated to include his 1952 recording of Harold in Italy with Carlton Cooley as the viola soloist. I can see why solo instrumentalists have been banished from the limelight; why otherwise is sonin-law Vladimir Horowitz's terrific account of the Tchaikovsky concerto not here? But Cooley's performance is different. It's a *concertante* role embedded deep in as fine a performance of *Harold in Italy* as any on record.

The edition is smartly designed, clearly annotated and comes with an essay by biographer Harvey Sachs. It is also competitively priced (about £40) – the upside of the fact that there are no texts, translations or synopses for the operatic items that take up nearly half the space.

As to the quality of the recorded sound, since the mid-1980s a series of gifted engineers has worked wonders with an archive legacy, some of whose dryly recorded originals defied plausible 78rpm or even LP release. In that respect, there has never been a better time to invest in the recorded legacy of this most potent of conductors. **Richard Osborne** 

#### THE RECORDINGS

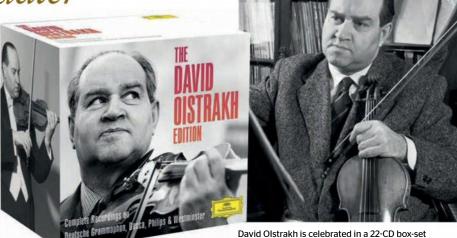
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## The fiddler's fiddler

avid Oistrakh's early prime marked something of a revolution in violin playing. Nothing quite like it had been heard before, 'the way [his] Brahms was like a big coat' (Anne-Sophie Mutter), where 'every note taken care of 100 per cent' (Nicola Benedetti), not to mention 'perfect articulation' of his playing (Julia Fischer). DG's handsome collection comes packaged with excellent essays by Julian Haylock, on Oistrakh's life, and Gidon Kremer, on his death. Kremer cites an 'inner equilibrium', which is telling because this admirable quality worked both in Oistrakh's favour and, just occasionally, against him. In the complete Beethoven sonatas with the very prominently balanced Lev Oborin Oistrakh's tasteful restraint occasionally compromises the music's more dramatic elements, though much of the playing is extremely beautiful. His greatest Soviet contemporary was the Heifetz-inspired Leonid Kogan, a matador of the bow who could generate levels of heat that lay outside Oistrakh's urbane stylistic range, Oistrakh more a gentlemanly Kreisler than a sportive Heifetz.

# An aristocrat of the bow with plenty to say, but who conveys what he needs to convey without ever forcing the issue

Writing in these pages back in February 1963, Dervck Cooke found Oistrakh's performance of the Hindemith Concerto (with the LSO under the composer's direction) 'an absolute revelation' – a view that surely still holds. Cooke rather cannily further observed 'that it might be argued that Oistrakh has hypnotised Hindemith into taking this emotional view of the work; but the truth is you can't get out of the music what isn't there'. He had not heard rival versions of Bruch's Scottish Fantasia, 'but I cannot imagine [one] finer'. Well, had he heard Heifetz with Sargent - made at around the same time as this Oistrakh recording with Jascha Horenstein - he may have had second thoughts. By comparison, Oistrakh, although magisterial and thoughtfully articulate, sounds one step removed from the music, certainly when heard next to the Hindemith Concerto. However, turn to the Brahms Concerto



under Franz Konwitschny and my own taste inclines me away from Heifetz, dazzling though his recording (with Reiner) is, to Oistrakh's expressive generosity, sweetness and fullness of tone, and his willingness to follow the conductor's expansive lead. On the rostrum himself Oistrakh could command richly surging string lines, as he does in Bruch's First Concerto for his son Igor, a glowing performance that was new to me.

Baroque repertoire is in plentiful supply here and I was especially happy to see the long-awaited local return of Oistrakh's indelibly memorable recordings of Bach's sonatas for violin and keyboard BWV1014-9 with harpsichordist Hans Pischner, even though the sound occasionally veers towards edginess. Best to sample is the E major Sonata, which convinces in terms of both tone and musicianship. Still, while listening I chanced upon a passage in Kremer's note where he recalls Oistrakh saving to a student 'we no longer play like that - if you'd have played like that 30 years ago, you'd have been successful'. And so what of listening to Oistrakh's 1960s Bach nowadays? Speaking personally, I'd be more than happy to hear anyone brave fads and fashions, even defy informed scholarship, to offer a performance of this exceptional quality.

A significant portion of the collection is devoted to generally well-transferred Melodiya recordings from the late 1940s/early 1950s that appeared on the (now) DG-owned Westminster or American Decca labels featuring the Oistrakh Trio (with Oborin and cellist Sviatoslav Knushevitsky) including a chipper account of Haydn's Trio in C, HobXV:27 – the finale really sparkles – as well as Rachmaninov's *Trio élégiaque*, where Oborin's playing has a

Horowitzian intensity about it, a fairly broad account of Dvořák's Dumky, Smetana's G minor, Taneyev's D major and the trios of Chopin and Ravel. Pride of place though must go to early recordings of the Glazunov and Prokofiev First Concertos, both under the young Kyrill Kondrashin, the Prokofiev recorded just three months after the composer's death and as spruce, pointed and rich in magic as any I've heard. The Glazunov, too, strikes me as more or less definitive, Oistrakh's way with nuancing and varied vibratos making the music all but speak to the listener. There are sonatas and other works with pianist Frida Bauer where the musical partnership is consistently sympathetic, Bach and Mozart with Igor, the E flat Sinfonia concertante under Kondrashin being a special prize while the B flat Concerto, K207 (coupled with Stravinsky's Concerto) under Bernard Haitink is scarcely less distinctive. Various shorter works, some involving Igor, display Oistrakh's refined brand of wit but I would single out two slightly longer pieces, Chausson's Poème and Ysaÿe's Poème élégiaque as being among the best places to sample the 'exquisite taste' that Haylock refers to (specifically in relation to Oistrakh's use of vibrato).

So, how best to sum up Oistrakh's style of playing? An aristocrat of the bow with plenty to say, but who conveys what he needs to convey without ever forcing the issue. By most accounts the man was reflected in his playing, a modest, noble, wise presence who transcends the limits of time through his recordings. And these are some of his finest. **Rob Cowan** 

#### THE RECORDING

#### The David Oistrakh Edition

DG (\$) (22 discs) 479 6580



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James Johnstone (organ)

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Martin Peerson (c1572–1651) was an immensely gifted and expressive composer who is almost unknown today. In his own time, however, he was much respected and published, perhaps the most able of those composers who were not in royal service. Following Fretwork's acclaimed release on Regent of 'Sublime Discourses', which featured the complete instrumental music of John Milton and Martin Peerson, I Fagiolini and Fretwork here come together with organist James Johnstone for the première recording of Peerson's *A Treatie of Humane Love*, newly edited by Richard Rastall. This release is a major contribution to the discography of 17th century English music in incomparable performances from some of the world's finest artists in the field.

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Vide, Domine, afflictionem Byrd; Evening Service 'in medio chori' Mundy; Ne irascaris Byrd; O salutaris hostia Tallis; Glorious and powerful God Gibbons; O sacrum convivium Tallis; In manus tuas Tallis; Videte miraculum Tallis; Praise our Lord, all ye Gentiles Byrd; Great Lord of Lords Gibbons; O Lord, make thy servant, Elizabeth Byrd; O God, the King of glory Gibbons; Tribulationes civitatum Byrd

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"Definitely something that will delight" Rupert Christiansen on Mignon

# Opera



## Neil Fisher on Anna Netrebko's Manon Lescaut from Salzburg:

Vocally Netrebko is in luxuriant form, her dark-tinted soprano as edible as all the chocs in a luxury assortment' ► REVIEW ON PAGE 90



## David Vickers relishes a dramma giocoso by Salieri:

"This enjoyable performance illustrates that the Mozart-da Ponte masterpieces were not invented in a vacuum" > REVIEW ON PAGE 91

#### **Ahmas**

Käärmesormus (Snake Ring)
Ulla Raiskio *mez*Zagros Ensemble / Petri Komulainen
Alba (M) ② ABCD394 (96° • DDD • S)



You can appreciate why Harri Ahmas describes his 2008 work *Käärmesormus* 

('Snake Ring') as a 'chamber opera' but the title is far from ideal. Pinning down this piece for mezzo and ensemble isn't easy, but it sits somewhere between Schubert's Winterreise (in its setting of first-person poems that link to form a narrative), George Benjamin's Written on Skin (in the mystery of its 16th-century French setting) and Turnage's Twice Through the Heart (a woman dealt a cruel hand indulging in a series of confessional monologues). Turnage describes his work as a 'dramatic scena' and that seems a better term for this piece too.

Tittamari Marttinen's poems on the subject of a Burgundy woman forced to renounce her true love and marry a stranger also carry something of *Written on Skin*'s eroticism, if not the tension that piece creates between characters, as here the protagonist Beata Lyonnaise sings/ speaks alone while the ensemble recites her epilogue. Ahmas sets each of the poems as a single entity with its own gait and stylistic colouring. Sometimes the music has a pained, atonal lyricism. Sometimes it pastiches klezmer and other clear styles. Sometimes it devolves into etched neoclassicism.

It can be hard to locate the discourse and its various stylistic adventures. But while Ahmas's music can sprawl conceptually, it is filled with invention, compositional discipline, extraordinary instrumentation (never do you tire of the 16 hands of the Zagros Ensemble) and a deep yet instant reaction to the text that gives it an almost Italian feel. When it matters, Ahmas controls himself with

good use of ostinato and patterning – or the pure colour of an instrument – even if he can sometimes appear to be too inventive for his own good.

Mezzo Ulla Raiskio herself discovered Marttinen's poems so we have her to thank for the existence of the piece. She sings with all the passion (both railing and veiled) that the woman's descent demands. But her voice is heavy and never sounds intimate or fragile, which is a key tenet of the narrative. Whatever Käärmesormus is, it's some achievement. Multiple further listens might reveal whether it's a strange masterpiece or just plain strange. Andrew Mellor

Boito Mefistofele	DVD S
René Pape bass	Mefistofele
Joseph Calleja ten	
Kristīne Opolais sop	
Karine Babajanyan sop	
Heike Grötzinger mez	Marta
Andrea Borghini bar	-
Rachael Wilson mez	Pantalis
Joshua Owen Mills ten	Nerèo

Chorus and Children's Chorus of the Bavarian State Opera; Bavarian State Orchestra / Omer Meir Wellber



Though far from being the topless, red-haired pantomime with which Samuel Ramey used to entertain us in this opera,

Roland Schwab's new Munich production still overfills the stage with extras trying too hard to be diabolical or sexy or both. Poor Boito: companies just won't trust his version of Goethe's *Faust*, virtually a *summum contra* Gounod's perceived frivolousness, to be performed with

genuine seriousness. It's certainly not perfect as a work. Predictable polish with words to be set is more often matched by ingenuity of choices of key and harmony than distinctive musicodramatic melodic setting.

Schwab and designers place the work in a broken-down stadium – with moving floors and walls - peopled by contemporarily dressed hippies, bikers, goths and emos. Mefistofele's control extends to running what looks awfully like a movie of the 9/11 Twin Towers attack. Then the production gets psychology (with a capital P) to represent the women he conjures up for Faust: Kristīne Opolais's Margherita and Heike Grötzinger's ultratarty Marta are already clearly disturbed while, in Act 4, Faust projects Elena (Helen of Troy) on to a nurse tending mental patients. Despite such interpolatations the staging remains essentially naturalistic.

René Pape's Mefistofele is restrained and autocratic according to the director's concept - and limited by the singer's own old-school operatic acting. (Most moves are transferred to strong beats in the orchestra and canoodling with lascivious playmates is not a strong point.) He exudes authority by his well-schooled German style of Italian declamation. Calleja is also far less camp (and, for that matter, wimpish) than has become the norm for Faust, to the opera's benefit. Both men are in seriously good voice. As is Opolais, who lavishes no small weight of tone on the part, particularly affecting in the prison scene. The chorus go to with a will, realising that this still underperformed work can be as much a vehicle for them as the operas of Boito's 'miglior fabbro' Verdi.

The whole – well recorded and helpfully filmed – is most precisely organised, balanced and conducted by Omer Meir Wellber, who is, nonetheless, unable to inject that spark of *italianità* that (as in Muti's 1995 RCA performance on CD) can translate Boito's heavier-scored passages in the Prologue and Epilogue away from sounding like an unlikely



Boito's Mefistofele is well recorded and helpfully filmed, in a production from the Bavarian State Opera

transalpine collaboration with Bruckner. Yet, reservations aside, this release is a good first calling post for Boito's drama.

#### Mike Ashman

Selected comparison: Muti (8/96<sup>R</sup>) (RCA) 88985 33494-2

#### **Grétry**

L'épreuve villageoise	
Sophie Junker sop	Denise
Talise Trevigne sop	Madame Hubert
Thomas Dolié bar	La France
Francisco Fernández-Rueda ten	André
Opera Lafayette / Ryan Brown	
Naxos M 8 660377 (54' • DDD)	



André-Ernest-Modeste Grétry was an important figure in the development

of *opéra comique* – where the musical numbers are separated by spoken dialogue – and *L'épreuve villageoise* ('The Village Trial') was one of his greatest successes. It started life as *Théodore et Paulin*, an opera in three acts, which was staged at Versailles in March 1784. Following its lukewarm reception, composer and librettist cut out the main

plot with its noble characters: what remained was a two-acter featuring a farmer's daughter, her mother and two suitors. Performed in Paris the following June, it was taken up all over Europe.

The story is a simple one. Denise loves André but, irritated by his jealousy, she is determined to teach him a lesson. So she encourages La France who, having earlier paid court to her mother, is now actively pursuing Denise herself. When André tears up a love letter to Denise from his rival, Mme Hubert decrees that her daughter shall marry La France. André pretends to have found a new girlfriend, Denise recognises that she too is susceptible to jealousy, and the lovers are reconciled; La France leaves in a rage.

Grétry's score ranges from simple strophic 'couplets' for Denise to extended 'chain' finales. The vocal lines are generally doubled in the orchestra, suggesting that the piece was designed for actors who could sing rather than vice versa. The most elaborate aria is La France's 'Adieu Marton, adieu Lisette, adieu Rosette', an anticipation of Petruchio's 'Where is the life that once I led?' in *Kiss Me, Kate*. The orchestra comprises woodwind and horns plus strings, with a prominent piccolo in the final Vaudeville. It is all delightfully

done by Opera Lafayette, an American period ensemble which has also recorded operas by Monsigny and Philidor as well as Grétry's *Le Magnifique*. The spoken dialogue is omitted but the complete libretto with translation is available online.

Richard Lawrence

#### Holst

At the Boar's Head	
Jonathan Lemalu bass-bar	Falstaff
Eric Barry ten	Prince Hal
Krzysztof Szumański bar	Bardolph
Kathleen Reveille mez	Doll Tearsheet
Gary Griffiths bar	Pistol
Nicole Percifield sop	Hostess
Adam Zdunikowski ten	Peto Gadshill

#### **Vaughan Williams**

Riders to the Sea <sup>a</sup>	
Kathleen Reveille mez	Maurya
Nicole Percifield sop	Cathleen
Evanna Chiew mez	Nora
Gary Griffiths bar	Bartley

<sup>a</sup>Warsaw Philharmonic Women's Chamber Choir; Warsaw Chamber Opera Sinfonietta / Łukasz Borowicz

Dux © ② DUX1307/8 (93' • DDD • T) Recorded live at the Warsaw Philharmonic Concert Hall, March 18, 2016

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'Clear-eyed and lovingly conducted': Christian Thielemann's Hänsel und Gretel from Vienna will be enjoyed by those who recoil from kitsch



Both of these oneact operas remain on the fringes of the repertoire, so any

new performance or recording is worthy of note, and particularly when prepared with such obvious care and affection as here, in concert performances from the 2016 Beethoven Festival in Warsaw. And they are very much concert performances. One only has to compare this reading of Holst's At the Boar's Head with the EMI recording under David Atherton to discern the difference. The latter, while a studio recording, bursts with theatricality from the very outset with Bardolph and Peto Gadshill's drunken banter. In this concert version, the effect is more formal and stilted, which is perhaps a by-product of Polish singers negotiating Shakespearean blank verse, but nevertheless creates the feeling of a cantata-like experience rather than an operatic one.

What makes this recording invaluable is Jonathan Lemalu's Falstaff. Articulate, charmingly churlish and aptly stentorian, it is such a vivid characterisation that it's a pity he's not supported with a stronger cast. Eric Barry's Prince Hal comes across as

whiny and petulant, no match for Philip Langridge's smiling, sweet-toned portrayal for EMI. Likewise, Kathleen Reveille's Doll Tearsheet lacks the aged yet still potent sexuality so richly conveyed by Felicity Palmer.

Reveille is better suited to the longsuffering Maurya in Vaughan Williams's grim yet lyrical drama. Her reedy mezzosoprano, with its pronounced beat, can be disconcerting, though there's no denying her emotional commitment and musicianship. Here, though, it's the supporting roles that impress. Nicole Percifield and Evanna Chiew are beautifully matched as Maurya's daughters, their voices entwined in elegiac resignation. And as the lone surviving son, Bartley, Gary Griffiths expresses youthful confidence with tragic verisimilitude.

Conductor Łukasz Borowicz is more at home in Vaughan Williams's intensely lyrical score than in the ribald humour of the Holst, though his orchestra play superbly in both works. The recording favours the voices but provides a reasonably natural perspective with no discernible audience noise, except for applause at the end of the Holst. Andrew Farach-Colton At the Boar's Head – selected comparison:

Atherton (3/83\*) (EMI/WARN) D 968929-2

#### Humperdinck



Video director Agnés Meth
EuroArts ® 207 2988; ® 207 2984
(113' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DTS-HD MA5.1,
DTS5.1 & PCM stereo • 0 • s)
Recorded live. November 2015



The Vienna State Opera performed *Hänsel und Gretel* a few months after the end of the Second World War at the

Volksoper, one of its temporary homes. It was revived there several times, but this production from November 2015 is the first to be staged at the company's rebuilt home on the Ringstrasse. It is a notable success – clear-eyed and lovingly conducted – but one that

you might find doesn't quite tug at the heart-strings.

It was an inspired idea to engage Adrian Noble and Anthony Ward as director and designer. The story comes from the brothers Grimm, but the setting is London in the early 1890s, the time of the opera's composition. The curtain rises during the Overture to reveal a family celebrating Christmas: mother, father, four children and Granny, liberally helping herself to the sherry. The father puts on a magic lantern show, after which they leave the room. 'Hänsel' and 'Gretel' return to play with the lantern, walk upstage and peer through a window. This turns out to be at the back of Peter the broom-maker's cottage: the cottage revolves and the opera begins. The various sets include a circular frame, carrying forward the idea of images projected by the magic lantern.

Adults playing children: always a problem. Daniela Sindram and Ileana Tonca horse about in Act 1 with as much conviction as one could reasonably expect. Janina Baechle is a formidable Gertrud, while Adrian Eröd doesn't overdo Peter's tipsiness. The mood darkens in Act 2, when the children are lost in the forest. The Evening Prayer is exquisitely phrased by Christian Thielemann and beautifully sung, too, with a video projection of an amusingly sleepy man-in-the-moon in the background. There is no ladder from heaven for the Dream Pantomime: instead of the 14 angels, children with balloons appear and the two Victorian children ascend in a chariot. This scene, and the preceding Sandman's song, seems to me to be lacking in magic.

Michaela Schuster, fearsomely bespectacled, has a fine old time as the Witch, without resorting to caricature or ugly sounds (except when casting her spell or cackling like Mime in Siegfried). At the end, the chariot descends and 'Hänsel' and 'Gretel' greet their opera counterparts. The subtitles seek to match the rhyming couplets of the German: not a good idea, when it leads to phrases like 'grim-looking wight'. The booklet includes a chapter-list and interviews with Thielemann and Noble. A few reservations, then, but this a fine production that will be especially enjoyed by those who recoil from kitsch. Richard Lawrence

#### Mascagni

Alexandros Tsilogiannis ten	Lesley
Quentin Hayes bass	Tom
Sarah Richmond mez	Willie

#### Chorus and Orchestra of Wexford Festival Opera / Francesco Cilluffo

RTÉ Lyric FM M ② CD152 (115' • DDD • S/T/t) Recorded live at the National Opera House, Wexford, October 31, 2015



Wexford Festival Opera is catnip for those seeking out rare repertory. It specialises

in digging up long-forgotten relics and has a happy knack of uncovering a gem. Mascagni's *Guglielmo Ratcliff* is more of a rough diamond, but one that thrilled both in the opera house and now on disc.

Although Cavalleria rusticana was the composer's breakthrough opera, Guglielmo Ratcliff was his first attempt, having to wait until after Cav (and L'amico Fritz) for its premiere. Mascagni adored Andrea Maffei's Italian translation of Heinrich Heine's Wilhelm Ratcliff to the point of obsession, reciting verses while pacing his room. It's a bloody tale, not far removed from Lucia di Lammermoor. Ratcliff, rejected by Maria MacGregor, has twice sought revenge by murdering her fiancés on the night before the wedding, each time presenting the unfortunate bride with a blood-soaked wedding ring. Margherita, an elderly inhabitant of the castle, reveals in a ballad that Maria's mother and Ratcliff's father were lovers, but the jealous MacGregor foiled their affair. During the opera, a third suitor arrives, Count Douglas. Ratcliff challenges him to a duel, loses, but has his life spared. The wounded Guglielmo confronts Maria, but she rejects him once again, at which point Ratcliff kills her, then her father, and finally himself. Fabio Ceresa's thrilling production played up the opera's gothic horror, but how well does it stand up musically?

There's a lot of narration (though this never stopped Il trovatore!) with key characters providing 'back story'. Mad Margaret's haunting ballad provides an early earworm (sung by the terrific Annunziata Vestri) and MacGregor's gory account is aided by Gianluca Buratto's sepulchral bass. But the opera stands or falls by its title-role...and Guglielmo Ratcliff is a killer. Francesco Tamagno, creator of Verdi's Otello, turned it down because of its vocal demands – from Act 2. the tenor is rarely offstage and the role has a relentlessly high tessitura. Angelo Villari's clarion tenor and tireless singing make this exciting listening, while Francesco Cilluffo

draws a terrific orchestral performance, especially in the peach of an intermezzo 'Il sogno di Ratcliff' (Ratcliff's Dream). An essential discovery. Mark Pullinger

#### **Puccini**

Manon Lescaut	
Anna Netrebko sop	Manon Lescaut
Yusif Eyvazov ten	Des Grieux
Armando Piña bar	Lescaut
Carlos Chausson bass-bar	Geronte
Benjamin Bernheim ten	Edmondo

#### Vienna State Opera Chorus; Munich Radio Orchestra / Marco Armiliato

DG (©) 20 479 6828GH2 (128' • DDD • S/T/t) Recorded live at the Grosses Festspielhaus, Salzburg, August 2016



Puccini dismissed concerns about following a hit version of the Abbé Prévost's

Manon with his own adaptation: 'Massenet feels it as a Frenchman, with powder and minuets. I shall feel it as an Italian, with a desperate passion.' Once upon a time Anna Netrebko applied the powder and danced Massenet's minuets, but now the Russian soprano has found meatier employment with the fiercer ladies of Puccini, Verdi and even Wagner (she sang Elsa in an acclaimed Dresden run of Lobengrin).

Netrebko first sang the heroine of Puccini's *Manon Lescaut* under Riccardo Muti, in Rome, in the production where she also met Yusif Eyvazov, now her husband. When it came to this complete recording of the opera, many might wish that Muti had transferred to last summer's semi-staged performances at the Salzburg Festival rather than Mr Netrebko. Instead the pair are joined by Marco Armiliato, the Münchner Rundfunkorchester and the Wiener Staatsopernchor.

Puccini's score offers diamonds in the rough: the desperate passion flares but the storytelling sometimes falters, and the supporting characters fade in and out of focus. Netrebko's may not be the most nuanced portrayal of the convent girl who goes from society queen to fallen woman, but it brims with conviction and – as can sometimes happen in this opera – there is no way that the tenor is going to steal this show.

Above all, this Manon knows her power. Even one of her very first lines, 'un chiostro m'attende' (a cloister awaits me) is wistful with a hint of knowingness, as if she grasps quite well why her brother might be shutting sis up in a convent. By the predations of Act 4 and the Louisiana



'A bloody tale, not far removed from Lucia di Lammermoor': Mascagni's long-forgotten first opera Guglielmo Ratcliff from Wexford Festival Opera

desert, self-awareness has kicked in, delivered in a lacerating 'Sola, perduta abbandonata' and Manon's frayed declarations of love for Des Grieux underscored by the too-late realisation of just how toxic she has really been for him. Vocally Netrebko is in luxuriant form, her dark-tinted soprano as edible as all the chocs in a luxury assortment (in which someone has thoughtfully removed the yucky strawberry creams).

So Netrebko is the diamond. And then there is the rough. Eyvazov has some impassioned moments but his voice is hit-and-miss, with ear-bleeding moments of raw, bleaty tone. In Act 1 he is trumped in style and finesse by Benjamin Bernheim's dreamy Edmondo. Armando Piña's Lescaut sounds far too doddery for Manon's rogueish brother; the effect is to render him too much like the old roué, Carlos Chausson's decent Geronte. Szilvia Vörös delivers a classy madrigal as the Musician.

As an overall package, it's not what I'd call Salzburg standard. The German orchestra play without much character and Armiliato shows more concern for following the central couple than shaping and guiding the disparate score. The chorus are over-miked at the expense of the singers. A scrappy DG booklet offers

a 1955 English translation, boring blackand-white photos and a breathlessly uninteresting essay. **Neil Fisher** 

#### Salieri

La scuola de' gelosi	
Emiliano d'Aguanno tenCo	nte Bandiera
Francesca Mazzulli Lombardi sop	Contessa
Federico Sacchi bass	Blasio
Roberta Mameli sop	Ernestina
Florian Götz bar	Lumaca
Milena Storti mez	Carlotta
Patrick Vogel ten	II Tenente
L'Arte del Mondo / Werner Ehrhardt	

#### L'Arte del Mondo / Werner Ehrhardt

Deutsche Harmonia Mundi (M) (3) 88985 33228-2 (161' • DDD • S/T/t)

Recorded live, Leverkusen, December 17-20, 2015



La scuola de' gelosi was originally produced in Venice during the 1778/79 carnival.

Haydn organised performances at Eszterháza (1780-81), and in 1783 it inaugurated Joseph II's new opera buffa troupe in Vienna – where the cast featured Francesco Benucci and Nancy Storace (later Mozart's first Figaro and Susanna). It has intriguing parallels with *Le nozze di Figaro*,

such as structural elements and some specific incidents (a count propositions a disguised woman, not realising it is his own countess), and the quick-paced crazy events and complicated emotions in the hierarchical love lives of noble, bourgeois and working-class characters. Moreover, there is an obvious kinship to *Così fan tutte* at this 'school' for lovers: a worldly wise lieutenant manipulates two hot-headed couples to become extremely jealous of their spouses before exposing the deception in order to teach them a humbling lesson.

Recorded live in Leverkusen by WDR, Werner Ehrhardt pays careful attention to details, and L'Arte del Mondo play more than capably in arias and ensembles that aptly characterise witty banter, scampering tetchiness, enraged outbursts and suave evocations of tenderness. Fortepiano continuo inclines towards anachronistic over-industry in recitatives (a passing mention of 'sposata' gives us a snatch of Wagner's Bridal March), but nonetheless contributes significantly to the vivid sense of theatricality in conversations between the excellent team cast.

The jealous merchant Blasio and his feisty wife Ernestina are sung with comic acumen by Federico Sacchi and Roberta Mameli. Francesca Mazzulli Lombardi's OPERA REVIEWS OPERA REVIEWS

eloquent Countess arrives halfway through Act 1 with a melancholic cavatina lamenting that her husband no longer loves her (there's something similar in the air to 'Porgi amor'). Emiliano d'Aguanno's smoky tenor makes the randy Count Bandiera's adulterous superficiality very clear, whereas Patrick Vogel's Lieutenant sings with a notch more *cantabile* sensitivity. Affectionate exchanges between the comic servants Carlotta and Lumaca are sung endearingly by Milena Storti and Florian Götz.

Suspicions, intrigues and attempted dalliances unravel and resolve in arias and ensembles that do credit to Salieri's musical abilities (even if the glib conclusion that men and women should stick with what they've already got rather than look elsewhere is not exactly the miracle of compassionate humanity at the close of *Figaro*). DHM's neglect to put aria titles in the track-listing or index numbers in the libretto seems lazy, but this enjoyable performance illustrates that the Mozart-da Ponte masterpieces were not invented in a vacuum. **David Vickers** 

Verdi

DVD 6

roidi	VIDEO Blu-ray Disc
La traviata	
Olga Peretyatko sop	Violetta
Atalla Ayan ten	Alfredo
Simone Piazzola bar	Germont
Christina Daletska mez	Flora
Deniz Uzun mez	Annina
Emiliano Gonzalez Toro ten	Gastone
Tom Fox bar	Baron Douphol
Konstantin Wolff bass-bar	Marquis d'Orbigny
Walter Fink bass	Doctor Grenvil

Balthasar Neumann Chorus and Ensemble / Pablo Heras-Casado

Stage director Rolando Villazón
Video director Nele Münchmeyer
C Major Entertainment € 22 733708;
€ 2733804 (139' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i •
DTS-HD MA5.1, DTS5.1 & PCM stereo • 0 • S/s)
Recorded live at the Festspielhaus, Baden-Baden,
May 2015



Rolando Villazón sings Alfredo, opposite Anna Netrebko, in what is probably one of the finest available versions of *La* 

traviata available on video, Willy Decker's Salzburg Festival production from 2005. Here he turns his hand to Verdi's middleperiod tear-jerker as director, in a bigbudget production filmed at the Baden-Baden Festspielhaus. He offers an interesting concept, set in the 'gaudy and sometimes deceptive realms of the circus', a

somewhat perfunctory booklet-note informs us, in which 'false exteriors aptly allegorise the appearances and truths of the main characters'.

Gaudy it certainly is. Johannes Leiacker's single set consists of a series of large multicoloured discs sitting askance over one another; one of them (reminiscent of the main visual motif of Decker's production) is a clock face. A halo of light bulbs sits at the back, a cloudy skyscape intermittently revealed within it. In Thibault Vancraenenbroeck's costume designs, the chorus and secondary characters are dressed as every circus act imaginable.

Violetta has a trapeze-artist double, who reflects her illness when she most strongly denies it, and who becomes increasingly central to the drama as Violetta herself is separated from it. Germont *père* appears as a kind of stony Commendatore: suitably implacable, perhaps, but also distant from the drama. It's a world of illusion that has some effective and imaginative moments. But the 'truths of the main characters' remain elusive; rather than unmasking the artifice and clarifying the action, it adds too much unnecessary distraction, muddying the characterisation and diluting the work's emotional impact.

It's a shame, because there are three fine central performances. Olga Peretyatko's Violetta is very well sung and acted – Act 1's pyrotechnics don't faze her – but the production and a lack of depth in the voice make for a portrayal that is less than ideally affecting. Atalla Ayan's Alfredo is heartfelt and lyrical, Simone Piazzola's excellent Germont impeccably stylish and powerfully projected.

Pablo Heras-Casado conducts the period instrumentalists of the Balthasar Neumann Ensemble with real fizz and excitement, though some might find his rubato occasionally exaggerated. It's an enjoyable show, then, but there are more moving and more concentrated *Traviatas* to be found elsewhere. **Hugo Shirley** 

Selected comparison:

Tannhäuser

Rizzi (9/06) (DG) 🕿 073 4189GH; 之 073 4525GH

#### **'Opera Gala'** 'Live from Baden-Baden'



Arias and ensembles from **Bizet** Carmen **Boito**Mefistofele **Bock** Fiddler on the Roof **Cilea** Adriana
Lecouvreur **Gounod** Faust **Lehár** Das Land des
Lächelns **Mascagni** L'amico Fritz. Cavalleria
rusticana **Puccini** Tosca **Rota** The Godfather **Verdi**Don Carlo. Otello. Un ballo in maschera **Wagner** 

Anja Harteros sop Ekaterina Gubanova mez Jonas Kaufmann ten Bryn Terfel bass-bar Badische Staatskapelle / Marco Armiliato Sony Classical (F) 222 88985 37161-9; (F) ≤2 88985 37162-9 (139' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DTS-HD MA5.1, DTS5.1 & PCM stereo • O • s) Recorded live 2016



Opera galas are strange beasts, but this one from Baden Baden in 2016 (the booklet doesn't give us the exact date) has much

to recommend it. The main attractions are some meaty extracts that offer glimpses of singers in roles otherwise unavailable: 10 minutes each of Anja Harteros's Tosca (a juicy confrontation with Bryn Terfel's Scarpia leading to a supremely classy and moving 'Vissi d'arte'), for example, plus a further taster of Jonas Kaufmann's Otello, in 'Già nella notte densa', to complement his recordings of the arias on his 'Verdi Album' (Sony, A/13).

In fact, it's the duets that fare best over all, and the *Otello* extract is probably worth the price of admission – somewhat steep on the night, one imagines – alone: it is sung with rare sensitivity and a chaste tenderness that create a powerful erotic charge. Kaufmann's duets with Ekaterina Gubanova, lengthy extracts each from *Cavalleria rusticana* and *Adriana Lecouvreur*, are excellent too.

Solo numbers are undoubtedly more difficult to pull off out of context. Kaufmann's 'E lucevan' shows him at his most mannered, for example, and Terfel's pantomime villain act as Boito's and Gounod's devils wears thin. His lack of legato and true bass colour is a problem, too, especially in Philip's aria from *Don Carlo*, where he seems completely at sea interpretatively. His Tevye from *Fiddler on the Roof*, though, underlines what a uniquely charismatic performer he remains.

Gubanova's solo numbers are impressive, especially her 'O don fatale', but it is repeatedly Harteros who steals the show: her *Tannbäuser* Elisabeth takes the tricky opening spot well, and her Verdi arias are grandly, imposingly affecting. She manages plenty of charm, too, in 'Son pochi fiori'.

The whole event is glitzy, with a set that is more reminiscent of the Oscars than any *Toscas*. It all gets increasingly chummy as we get closer to the final Lehár singalong. The playing of the Badische Staatskapelle is decent – with excellent contributions from a busy principal cellist – and Marco Armiliato keeps everything ticking along well.

Sony's booklet offers only track listings and photographs, and the sound is a little over-reverberant, but there's enough quality here to make this well worth seeking out. **Hugo Shirley**  The Editors of Gramophone's sister music magazines, Jazzwise and Songlines, recommend some of their favourite recordings from the past month

# Jazz

Brought to you by JAZZWISE

#### **Led Bib**

#### Umbrella Weather RareNoiseRecords © RNRO71



The Vienna sessions for Led Bib's sixth studio album were a potential last stand for a band questioning their future.

For the first time, each member arrived with compositions new to the others, and renewed, resurrecting purpose. Sometimes dubbed punk-jazz, they offer a richer picture here. 'Lobster Terror' is typical, its explosively confrontational start redeemed by soaring, interwoven alto sax melodies. Keyboardist Toby McLaren adds atmospheric electronic distortion, aiding the eerie hush of 'On the Roundabout', which finds a sonic space between The Clangers' papier mache moonscape and a forgotten Casbah corner, while his

composition 'Ceasefire' has passages of proggy, Radiohead-like grandeur. *Umbrella Weather* sometimes brutally powers through its 76 minutes, refusing to flag even as it finds space for the breathily amiable alto conversation which begins 'At the Shopping Centre', the delicate and the limpid. Nothing's a half-measure, or half-formed. 'Goodbye' finishes in exultant, swinging unison, one last rush and push towards a resurgent future. **Nick Hasted** 

#### **James Brandon Lewis**

#### No Filter BNS ® BNS-32



An entirely fitting title for music where raw and unrefined is anything but a failing. Keyboard-less, chord-less and largely changes-less, the material

has the kind of percolating, explosive

character that defines hip hop of the most uncut kind. But the writing and playing expose and extend the roots of rap in funk and blues, the net result being that, in its most inspired moments, Lewis's trio channels the subversive spirit of Eddie Harris right into the digital age all the while reminding us that the majesty of Public Enemy was reducible to the hardness of the horn breaks as well as Chuck D's raging soliloquies. Although saxophonist Lewis, who impressed with his avant-gospel ingenuity on 2015 Divine Travels, is largely in the spotlight as a soloist the thrust of drummer Stewart and bassist Crudup III is not to be overlooked, as are the guest appearances of rapper PSO, singer Gant and guitarist Pirog. There is a compellingly stark landscape fashioned by this group that stands as a vital counterpoint to the emptiness of what passes for 'events' in modern day culture. Kevin Le Gendre

## World Music

### Brought to you by SONGLINES

#### Black String

#### Mask Dance

ACT Records F ACT 9036-2



The Korean quartet Black String take their name from the geomungo, the funkiest of Korea's zithers, whose name translates as 'black

string'. Yoon Jeong Heo, leader of the group, is a superb geomungo player and is joined by Aram Lee on daegeum (flute), Min Wang Hwang on janggu drum and percussion and Jean Oh on electric guitar: three Korean instruments plus a Western one, although the music remains firmly Korean in character. The album opens with soft, tentative sounds as the instruments slowly introduce themselves until the janggu drum takes up a steady rhythm. Once the drum starts, the opening 'Seven Beats' has an unstoppable momentum, with the

geomungo lending a rhythmic throb as the guitar and reedy flute reach dizzy heights. It returns to a calm close 11 minutes later. The flute leads in 'Growth Ring', the geomungo in 'Flowing, Flowing', and the drum in the triple-beat 'Dang, Dang, Dang', while percussionist Min breaks into soulful vocals on a couple of tracks. In short the album is full of dynamic landscapes, rhythms and textures. Simon Broughton

#### **Voxtra**

#### The Encounter of Vocal Heritage

Muziekpublique © MUZIEKOO8



Migrancy is an inescapable condition of our time, and people in movement carry remembrances of home with them. Music is one

of the most important. Sometimes people strive to preserve it unchanged, sometimes they hybridise it with new sounds, and sometimes, having forged or pursued a career in a globalised form such as jazz or hip-hop, return for aesthetic or economic reasons to the music of their homeland. All three of these strategies are represented in this powerful collection of mostly a capella songs. They stem from collaborations of migrants to the Low Countries from Albania, Sardinia, Finland and Madagascar, with the enthusiastic help of a pair of Belgian natives. Although each group or individual is given the chance to represent a fairly unadulterated song from their tradition, most of the tracks comprise some kind of hybrid. But it could be said that disassociating musical styles from the cultural matrix in which they have formed mirrors the immigrant experience of arrival, and this attempt at finding co-operation in multiculturalism deserves much praise. Kim Burton

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## MUSICAL CONNECTIONS

#### James Jolly embarks on two musical journeys inspired by Christian Gerhaher's Schubert

#### German song-cycles

The invention of the song-cycle is usually credited to Beethoven and Weber, and both composers' cycles are rewarding listens. The Beethoven is a wonderful creation which elevates the piano's role to that of equal (especially given the cycle's postlude which prepared the way for Schubert and Schumann), while Weber's four-songcycle, Die Temperamente beim Verluste der Geliebten concerns itself with the poet's reaction to lost love. (Schubert's mastery of the form – has it ever been bettered? – needs little advocacy, and recordings of his two cycles abound.) Of Schumann's cycles, Dichterliebe never fails to touch the heart, and the subtlety of the narrative gives the performers huge licence for 'interpretation': Ian Bostridge is wonderfully imaginative here. Of Mahler's song-cycles, his Kindertotenlieder uses mood to unify, and creates an enveloping emotional response to the loss of a child. Strangely, Richard Strauss never really embraced the form (though many of his groups of vocal pieces, like

the Four Last Songs, have a powerful unity of atmosphere): his three-song Ophelia Lieder, however, make a perfect trio with an intoxicatingly modernist flavour. **Schoenberg**'s Das Buch der hängenden Gärten (1910) explores a doomed love affair against the backdrop of a garden – Gerhaher is magnificent here. Ernst Krenek's 1929 Alpine travelogue in 20 songs reinvents the Schubertian cycle with masterly results. Hanns Eisler's 1943 Hollywood Songbook resurrects an Old World form in the New World - magical when done with the intelligence of Matthias Goerne. The Swiss Othmar Schoeck's claustrophobic cycle Lebendig begraben (1927) finds a man literally buried alive in a coffin – it's a horrifying image and, by extension, explores a man's spiritual burial under the weight of life's demands. Wolfgang Rihm's Das Rot (1991), for high voice, finds the songcycle in good health even if it's an unsettling experience, like standing on the edge of a precipice, the fall inevitable.

**Beethoven** An die ferne Geliebte Goerne Decca **Weber** Die Temperamente beim Verluste der Geliebten Prey Warner Classics

Schumann Dichterliebe Bostridge Warner Classics Mahler Kindertotenlieder Baker Warner Classics R Strauss Ophelia Lieder Karg Berlin Classics Schoenberg Das Buch der hängenden Gärten Gerhaher Sony Classical

**Krenek** Reisebuch aus den österreichischen Alpen Holzmair **Philips** 

Eisler Hollywood Songbook Goerne Decca Schoeck Lebendig begraben Fischer-Dieskau BNF Rihm Das Rot Gerhards Coviello



Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, a giant among Lieder singers

#### German baritones

We're celebrating the artistry of baritone Christian Gerhaher this month, so it's an ideal opportunity to place him alongside some of the finest Lieder singers of the German-speaking world. Gerhaher worked with Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, a giant among singers in the second half of the last century, and his influence on later generations is immense: it's most noticeable in the declamatory style he made his own and which his followers generally assimilated without mimicry. Our current Young Artist of the Year, Benjamin Appl (Fischer-Dieskau's last pupil), reveals a powerful gift for communication which he achieves with a voice that is still gaining strength and power. Andreas Schmidt, his voice slightly darker in timbre than that of his teacher Fischer-Dieskau, savours words in a way that really connects - try his Loewe songs with Cord Garben at the piano for the story-teller's craft at its finest. Another Fischer-Dieskau pupil, Stephan Genz, uses his 'mellow' and 'companionable' (Richard Wigmore's

words) baritone to achieve great expression: try his Winterreise with Michel Dalberto, a powerful experience that never resorts to histrionics. Matthias Goerne, possessor of one of the most beautiful baritone voices of recent decades, has followed in the master's footsteps by recording all the Schubert songs a fabulous achievement with insights at every turn (try his Winterreise with Eschenbach). And don't forget Olaf Bär whose Lieder discs from the 1980s and '90s were characterised by freshness and wonder – his Die schöne Müllerin still captivates. Dietrich Henschel, often compared with Fischer-Dieskau, brings a powerful intelligence to his singing but, in textfocused Lieder like Wolf's, is very much his own man. But there was a life in Lieder before Fischer-Dieskau -**Gerhard Hüsch** demands to be listened to, with his focused tone and palpable joy in singing (I love his An die ferne Geliebte). And don't forget Hermann Prey - again, darker of voice than Fischer-Dieskau, but with a wonderfully flexible instrument and a stage presence that had the audience eating out of his hand: just sample his Cornelius songs...



To explore these playlists via a streaming service, or to create your own, we suggest qobuz.com. You can listen to these particular playlists at gramophone.co.uk/playlists Schubert Abendbilder Gerhaher RCA
Schubert Winterreise Fischer-Dieskau DG
Schubert Lieder Appl Wigmore Hall Live
Loewe Schmidt CPO
Schubert Winterreise Genz Claves
Schubert Winterreise Goerne Harmonia Mundi
Schubert Die schöne Müllerin Bär Warner Classics
Wolf Mörike-Lieder Henschel Fuga Libera
Beethoven An die ferne Geliebte Hüsch Preiser
Cornelius Vaterunser Prey DG

## REPLAY

Rob Cowan's monthly survey of historic reissues and archive recordings

## An alternative approach to Brahms

Michael Gielen offers intelligent, highly musical recordings of the Brahms symphonies and concertos

o one with well-functioning ears could accuse Michael Gielen of being besotted with tonal glamour so don't expect his Brahms – the focal point of SWR Music's 'Michael Gielen Edition, Vol 3' – to deliver the heft, sweetness or regal polish of, say, Karajan or even Rattle. Except maybe in the Fourth Symphony where textures are uncommonly rich, the bass-line full and lustrous, and the playing of the second movement's glorious second subject as warmly expressive as you could wish for, especially second time around when the lower strings take the lead.

This is highly intelligent conducting, the brass ringing resplendent in the same symphony's first movement, with arguments kept taut and on the move, the Scherzo lively but not too fast, the finale opening quite softly (a very legato approach to the passacaglia theme) but reaching an impressive full height as the movement progresses. Once through, you feel you've really been places. Gielen's policy with first-movement exposition repeats is interesting. Possibly the least popular is the one for the First Symphony. That one Gielen takes, the important repeat for the Third too, but strangely not for the Second which is the one instance where Brahms returns us to his initial arguments on the wings of a beautiful linking passage that is otherwise lost to us.

The Second has always divided opinion as to its specific climate: is this music autumnal, or is it spring-like? The former stance is incomparably expressed on a 1951 live New York Philharmonic broadcast under Bruno Walter (recently reissued on Pristine Audio, PASC485), a performance of such inner warmth that once heard it bonds permanently to your memory bank. Gielen takes a lighter, gentler, more transparent view of the music, right from the symphony's opening phrases where horns and

woodwinds launch a balmy exchange, leading to the main body of the Allegro non troppo, with its pert woodwind interjections and swiftly flowing 'lullaby' second subject. The movement's exposition is keenly though flexibly driven, whereas the development presses onwards a ratchet or two. The Adagio is very much non troppo: note how Gielen observes the poco espressivo direction, such carefully observed dynamics, too, the mood kept decidedly pastoral. By comparison Walter in 1951 is broader, darker, more heavily etched in terms of texture and more sweetly expressive. Gielen's Allegretto grazioso third movement serves as a breezy intermezzo, the finale, a source of emotional release, bracing though unforced and with judiciously modulated tempos and a mode of orchestral attack that never slips into aggressive overkill.

The Second Symphony's fill-up is a skilfully balanced account of the *Haydn* Variations. Gielen and his SWR orchestra open the set with purposeful account of the *Tragic Overture*, dramatic but never overstated.

The First Symphony, like the Second, launches without either rhetorical exaggeration or the least sense of melodrama. A first movement timing of 15'16" initially hoodwinked me into suspecting that the repeat is omitted but as I've already said, it isn't. Gielen sticks to a highly mobile tempo. Likewise, the *Andante sostenuto* has a flowing, song-like quality about it, with effective dovetailing between woodwind soloists and with well-gauged climaxes. The *Allegretto* is swift, the finale usefully goal-orientated: the symphony's close is especially impressive.

Gielen's way with the Third is for the most part sunny and lyrical, the first movement *Allegro* properly *con brio*, the middle movements similarly paced but well defined in terms of mood while the finale is animated and vividly accented.

Schoenberg's orchestration of the First Piano Quartet has often been dubbed, partially in jest I would imagine, as 'Brahms's Fifth' though if you're in the least serious about the symphonic reference, Brahms's 'proper' First would be a more accurate description, the Quartet's composition dating from 1856-51, the Symphony from 1855-76. Gielen's performance is rowdy and spontaneous, as compelling an argument for the transcription as you're ever likely to hear.

There are two 'first release' recordings included here, the Schicksalslied, Op 54 (with the WDR Cologne Radio Choir), where the C minor middle episode really catches fire and the First Piano Concerto (recorded in 1991) where Gerhard Oppitz, a superb Brahmsian whose recordings of the complete solo piano works (RCA) hold a very special place in my affections, suggests to me, in its virility and intelligence, a lighter-toned equivalent of Rudolf Serkin. The Double Concerto, another excellent performance, is entrusted to violinist Mark Kaplan and cellist David Geringas and is notable for its lyricism and liveliness.

It seems obvious to me that Michael Gielen proposes we listen to Brahms for the sake of his musical arguments rather than for the lustrous sounds that he's capable of conjuring, an approach that strikes me as eminently sensible, and a valid alternative to various fleshier interpretative options. The sound is for the most part extremely good.

#### THE RECORDINGS



Brahms Symphonies and Concertos
'Michael Gielen Edition, Vol 3'
SWR Music ® \$SWR19022CD



Michael Gielen offers a fresh take on Brahms with the SWR Symphony Orchestra

#### Complete Zukerman

In 2000, Pinchas Zukerman was quoted in the Toronto Globe and Mail as saying he 'hates' early music; that early music is 'disgusting...and complete rubbish, and [so are] the people who play it.' The pinch of salt needed to interpret this rather perplexing claim emerges afresh in the context of the excellent collection 'Pinchas Zukerman: Complete Recordings on Deutsche Grammophon and Philips' and a reissue of Zukerman's expressively restrained, silky smooth and superbly played complete 'modern instrument' set of Bach's Brandenburg Concertos. Listening afresh to these and other Bach concertos in the collection, as well as to the Brahms violin and viola sonatas with Daniel Barenboim (where Zukerman, like David Oistrakh, is as accomplished a viola player as a violinist) underlines the fact that for all his matinee idol status this most accomplished of players is a deeply refined musician technically polished, deeply committed, tonally mellow, subtle, inward-looking and consistently lyrical. No fads or fashions impede here; the only imperative is the music itself, and therein lies Zukerman's interpretative nous.

The same set includes the major concertos by Beethoven, Mendelssohn, and Sibelius, as well as gripping accounts of the Schubert piano trios with Ashkenazy and Harrell and various sonatas. I especially enjoyed the Haydn and Mozart concertos where honeyed understatement allows the music to glow naturally from the inside, as well as

various romances and 'encores' and as a bonus the music drama *Through Roses* by Zukerman's long-term duo partner the composer-pianist Marc Neikrug. Zukerman's quoted claim that 'music gives me energy, emotion, everything' is here amply substantiated in numerous performances that are both durable and deeply satisfying. A set to return to again and again.

#### THE RECORDING



'Pinchas Zukerman: Complete Recordings on Deutsche Grammophon and Philips' DG © (22 discs) 479 5983

#### American symphonies

Childhood memories of Serge Koussevitzky's two HMV 78s of Roy Harris's 'brave-new-world' Third Symphony still burn bright, Harris the archetypical pioneering musical American, born to poor parents in an Oklahoma log cabin on Lincoln's birthday, the symphony itself one of the greatest of the period. The Sixth (Gettysburg) too, and the Fifth which Pristine has just released in a world premiere performance with the Boston Symphony under Koussevitzky, astonishingly assured, beautifully played and above all – in the central 'Chorale' - imbued with that unmistakeable nobility that was at the very epicentre of Harris's art. The finale is thrilling, and so is the closing Allegro vigoroso of David Diamond's Second Symphony, recorded a year

later (another premiere, from 1944). Set between these two imposing works is the more conventional First Symphony of Edward Burlingame Hill (1872-1960). Hill's central *Moderato maestoso* has a hint of Tchaikovsky, maybe even Scriabin about it, which might help explain why the Russian Koussevitzky's performance is so compelling. Variable sound, unexpectedly good at best, serviceable at worst. An important release.

#### THE RECORDING



Diamond Symphony No 2
Harris Symphony No 5
Hill Symphony No 1
Boston SO / Koussevitzky
Pristine Audio © PASC484

#### Erik Then-Bergh

Two benchmark Reger piano-music recordings arrive via APR: a 1951 version of the delightful Variations and Fugue on a Theme of Georg Philipp Telemann and a stereo recording of the Piano Concerto with Hans Rosbaud conducting. The pianist in both instances is Erik Then-Bergh (1916-82), much respected as both a pedagogue and a performer, rather in the Eduard Erdmann mould, his performances thought through from the first bar to the last. The Reger Variations in particular are joyous, elegant and crisply articulated. The massive concerto has a naturalness about it that eluded even Rudolf Serkin (who gave us fine versions of both Reger works, now on Sony Classical), due in no small measure to Rosbaud's ever-considerate and welljudged support.

Other recordings featured date from wartime, or just before, most originating from Electrola 78s. Handel's Suite No 4 reminds me of Gieseking or Borovsky in Baroque music, Bach's Chaconne in Busoni's transcription flys high on a heady combination of wild spontaneity, pianistic brilliance and architecture knowingly observed. Perceptive accounts of Chopin's greatest Nocturne (at least that's my view, Op 62 No 1), sonatas by Beethoven (Op 101) and Schumann (Op 22), plus miniatures by Beethoven and Reger, complete a highly desirable memorial to a much-undervalued pianist. Excellent transfers. **6** 

#### THE RECORDING



'Erik Then-Bergh: The complete Electrola and Deutsche Grammophon recordings 1938-1958'
APR (1) (2) APR6021

# Books



## Hugo Shirley peruses a compendium of Pucciniana:

'There is, perhaps reassuringly, a great deal of the death-of-opera hand-wringing that is a constant refrain in writing about opera'



## Mike Ashman wrestles with opera, technology and cultural shifts

Leppert is fascinating on the culture of early gramophone listening, and the exclusivity and "fetishisation" of record collecting'

#### Giacomo Puccini and His World

Edited by Arman Schwartz & Emanuele Senici Princeton University Press, PB, 360pp, £24.95 ISBN 978-0-6911-7286-6



Stemming from annual events at the Bard Music Festival, Princeton's 'composer and his world'

series (it's always been 'his' so far) has been running since 1990, offering reassessments and realignments of major and not-so-major musical figures. *Puccini and His World* follows the familiar format, offering a selection of essays (coming out of papers given across the event) followed by useful collections of primary sources, in this case some letters, new translations of contemporary writing on Puccini and his contemporaries plus fascinating excerpts from the staging manual produced for the Paris premiere of the revised *Madam Butterfly*.

These sources, all of them given useful annotations and in-depth, expert introductions, are fascinating, even if several of them are more about Puccini's world than Puccini himself. They deal with questions regarding *verismo* and realism (operatic realism, a recurring observation tells us, is a contradiction in terms), ideas of national schools and what they represent, and strategies for dealing with the Wagnerian inheritance. There's also, perhaps reassuringly, a great deal of the death-of-opera hand-wringing that is and almost always has been a refrain in writing about opera.

Selections from Fausto Torrefranca's infamous anti-Puccini polemic of 1912, *Giacomo Puccini and International Opera*, offer a valuable glimpse into the struggle in Italy to establish a strong (usually gendered, unsurprisingly, as masculine) national identity; Puccini's music was, Torrefranca argued, hopelessly feminine. The 'international' epithet, a decade before

Italian fascism fully established itself, was an insult – as it seems increasingly to be now too.

The *Butterfly* staging manual presents a detailed and fixed record of how Puccini, through the production's director, Albert Carré, wanted his opera staged. In so doing, it inevitably raises questions about the relationship of Puccini's operas, in some ways reluctant subjects for directorial intervention, with modern staging practices. And the same qualities that have been seen as making the works resistant to such approaches, one might think, are precisely those that have traditionally led musicology to be a bit sniffy about the composer.

His popularity of course is one problem, as is the fact that his music is seen as appealing - often cynically and manipulatively - more to the heart than the head, with few hidden layers of meaning. And some of this book actually serves to reinforce that impression. Leon Botstein -Bard's musical mastermind - chooses in his long central essay to offer an international perspective by comparing three Puccini works with three roughly contemporaneous operas by other composers: 7enůfa is lined up against Butterfly, Der Rosenkavalier against La fanciulla del West and Suor Angelica against Hindemith's Sancta Susanna. Such comparisons tend only to be moderately fruitful, and here they seem largely to highlight Botstein's preference for the other composers' works and unwillingness to examine Puccini's in any great detail. He underplays the social critique that lies nascent in Suor Angelica, for example, and which has been unleashed in some recent stagings - among them Richard Jones's Covent Garden production, which turns the piece into an excoriating critique of oppressive and uncaring institutions.

Elsewhere in the essays a sense of Puccini's works being shoehorned into theoretical arguments can sometimes make one wonder whether Puccini is better off without some newer trends in musicology. Many, I suspect, will fail to be convinced by Arman Schwartz's argument that the

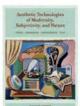
tentative, timid tone of Mimi's introductory aria in Act 1 of *La bohème* is the result of Rodolfo's 'Che gelida manina' being primarily about that character's aggressive ego-assertion; how, then, does one account for their harmonious togetherness in the subsequent duet? There is undoubtedly a danger that, to borrow one of Pinkerton's metaphors, these operatic butterflies are rendered dull and lifeless when pinned down for such close inspection from such counterintuitive angles.

For those wanting to explore the essays, I'd recommend skipping the Introduction and jumping straight in with Ellen Lockhart's fascinating look into newly released archival material pertaining to Fanciulla and Micaela Baranello's exploration, nicely peppered with wry observations, of La rondine's history and problematic position in Puccini's oeuvre, stuck, as she puts it, 'in a purgatory between opera and operetta'. Ben Earle's 'Puccini, Fascism and the cast of Turandot' offers some fascinating, uncomfortable insights on the composer's relationship with politics. The other essays offer much of interest, too, but, as with much of the book, often feel designed for the writers' musicologist peers and students than the more general reader. Hugo Shirley

## Aesthetic Technologies of Modernity, Subjectivity and Nature

#### By Richard Leppert

University of California Press, HB, 348pp, £58.95 ISBN 978-0-5202-8737-2



Professor Leppert has worked a lot both with German philosopher Theodor W Adorno's

writings on music, and with what lies behind music at the specific time and place of its creation. His new book's unwieldy



The final scene from La fanciulla del West, Metropolitan Opera, 1910: Enrico Caruso as Dick Johnson, Emmy Destinn as Minnie, and Pasquale Amato as Jack Rance

title gives the clue to its ambitious leaning on both those interests.

Leppert starts with Virginia Woolf's apparently ex nusquam statement that 'On or about December, 1910, human character changed', linking this to that month's Metropolitan Opera premiere of La fanciulla del West, 'Puccini's initial, if tentative (but hardly insubstantial), genuflection to modernism, a score well noted for its dynamic aggressiveness and harmonic discord'. Details of the staging of Puccini's source - David Belasco's hit Wild West play - and its relationship with the opera can be traced in some detail via the research links in Leppert's endnotes. They open up another of the book's main themes - how culture (and here, specifically, music) has become almost an imitative substitute for (or even an enemy of) nature in modern works of art. As Adorno and Max Horkheimer wrote: 'What human beings seek to learn from nature is how to use it to dominate wholly both it and human beings.'

There follow a range of examples. Two films by Terrence Malick - their soundtrack music includes Wagner's Das Rheingold and Saint-Saëns's Carnaval des animaux - show nature in the raw invaded by man. Werner Herzog's film Fitzcarraldo has a Brazilian rubber plantation hacked into by a Carusoloving entrepreneur and his gramophone, in an attempt to finance a new opera house in the jungle. And Bartók's Judith reacts (with a 'perhaps agonised high C') to the first sight of her husband Bluebeard's kingdom, itself a subjugation of the natural.

Here, as in several other places in his text, Leppert allows unnecessarily complex vocabulary to come in between him and accessible readership. He comments: 'I'll argue that this note constitutes itself as a micrological modernist rejection not only of the pleasure principle that opera had provided by means of tonal harmony but also, and more important, of the sociocultural semiotics that tonality promoted.' In English, please – Bartók is interfering with a good old soprano top note for the sake of new artistic communication? On a similar subject – but more approachably worded - is an explanation of how Luciano Berio's fearlessness in employing a contemporary idiom in his new completion of Puccini's *Turandot* actually helps the opera resolve the dramatic problem of making its titular heroine sympathetic in the wake of Liù's death.

Before this come two chapters with outstandingly reproduced illustrations. 'Caruso, Phonography and Operatic Fidelities' shows, with examples from the lavish early Victor catalogues (and their New Edison rivals) how (in Leppertspeak) 'Caruso became a textual-visual advertising code for singing itself and all that vocal music could "do" for its auditors in pursuit of democratically available selfimprovement – provided one had the funds to buy the expensive discs'. Yet Leppert is mostly fascinating on the culture of early gramophone owning and listening - not to mention about the sound tests dreamed up by the companies to 'prove' that their records were like the

real artist singing, or to assess a listener's mood-changes from 'serious' to 'gay'. It's as if he's preparing the way in retrospect for Adorno's famous attacks, also discussed here, on the exclusivity and 'fetishisation' of record collecting. A second illustrated chapter deals with the range of art devoted to the self-voyeurism ('selfies' avant la lettre?) of opera house audiences themselves.

More purely musical flourishes by the author include an assessment of the grace notes assigned by Puccini to his leading pair in *La bobème*. At the risk of appearing weak Rodolfo is allowed such 'vocal tears', especially in Act 3, because 'as a poet, his identity is culturally marked as liminal between the feminine and the masculine; his given "profession" provides him cultural licence'. His emotions are neatly compared to those of country singers Hank Williams and Patsy Cline despairing over failed relationships.

Strictly judged as a single thesis, there is too much over-writing, too many diversions and some surprising little errors - Wagner came from Genoa, not the too distant Venice, for his 'vision' at La Spezia and, another watershed, the 'fateful horn call near the end' of Fidelio is surely a trumpet call. But Leppert's red-herring enthusiasm for, say, the films of Terrence Malick will probably carry you along with him in an enjoyable rummage through this beautifully published grab-bag of developing ways of expression in 20th-century opera and music-making.

Mike Ashman

# Classics RECONSIDERED





Rob Cowan and Caroline Gill reassess Pierre Fournier's 1960s traversal of the complete Bach Cello Suites



#### **Bach**

Cello Suites Nos 1-6, BWV1007-1012

Pierre Fournier vc

Archiv Produktion © 2 449 7112

Fournier is splendidly assured in technique and warm in tone throughout, and is excellently recorded (in rather more resonant surroundings than Starker), but he never matches Starker's extraordinary effortlessness. In No 2 he takes the Prelude flexibly, however, and shows a fine rhythmic impetus throughout the suite. In the Minuets he is a good deal more deliberate and forceful than Starker (who took them rather fast, with entirely convincing results), and in the Gigue more weighty; and in the Courante there is less subtlety of coloration. In the G major Suite I still find Starker's Gigue a little lacking in bite, but Fournier's speed, though more incisive, strikes me as a bit

ponderous. His Prelude doesn't just ripple off the bow; the Allemande is characterised by some very un-Baroque bulges of tone at odd places, and in the Courante he falls into a mannerism of stressing anacrusic phrase-beginnings. No, I feel that Starker still holds the field, though this is a worthy contender.

**Lionel Salter** reviewing Suites Nos 1 & 2 (11/62)

I entirely agree with Lionel Salter who reviewed the first of Fournier's records of the Bach unaccompanied Cello Suites last November, that the only serious competitor among the available versions is Starker. I am not quite so certain, though, that if I had to choose between the two it would be Starker. I prefer the less glamourised acoustic that Columbia have given him, and in many movements I find his inward style of playing very attractive, but there is an occasional

sense of nervous tension in his bowing that can become uncomfortable. Fournier is rather grander, more sophisticated and fluent, and on balance I find this preferable. His more genial approach prevents him from ever seeming to rush, as I think Starker does in both the Prelude and the Gigue of the E flat major Suite. Fournier's rhythmic spans are also a little longer and more flexible; though some may find his occasional rhythmic freedoms a shade too 'romantic' they seem to me to be controlled by an impeccable taste. So on balance I should be inclined to choose Fournier's performance rather than Starker's, if I had to, for its more relaxed eloquence - but with the proviso that these performances are both so distinguished that anyone who already owns Starker's recording has no cause for dissatisfaction at all.

**Jeremy Noble** reviewing Suites Nos 3 & 4 (3/63)

**Rob Cowan** It's at times like this that I find harking back to the opinions of our illustrious reviewing forebears remarkably interesting. Here you find Lionel Salter pitting Pierre Fournier's assured technique against János Starker's extraordinary effortlessness whereas Jeremy Noble, who unlike Salter prefers Fournier overall, appreciates the Frenchman's more genial approach. With Starker's 1963 Mercury set still imminent at the time (though we wouldn't see it for a long while here in the UK) and Harnoncourt's plain-speaking accounts auspicious in principle rather than in practice, Starker on EMI and Fournier on Archiv were the finest exponents of these suites to arrive on LP beyond the Great Recordings of the Century transfers of the charismatic pre-war Casals recordings (1957), a benchmark then, as they are now.

**Caroline Gill** I love the way you describe Harnoncourt's version as 'auspicious in principle rather than in practice'. These days it's second nature for us to discuss recordings of these masterpieces in terms of their performance practice rather than the first impressions of their musicality, and in some ways I think the 1960s was a golden age for examining their unadulterated beauty above everything else. The awe with which Casals so clearly viewed the suites may have given them a context of greatness, but the recordings of the likes of Starker, Cassadó and Tortelier (which were made in 1961 but, interestingly, not mentioned by either Salter or Noble) presented them as music for music's sake. That's my theory, anyway...

**RC** Right from the opening of the First Suite's Prelude, Fournier leans and

breathes his way around the notes, always flexibly responsive, whereas Starker etches subtle echoes into repeated phrases, plying his burning vibrato at moments of high tension. That latter attribute is wonderfully effective in the succeeding Allemande, whereas Fournier, who opts for a swifter pace overall, achieves greater suppleness and variety of gesture and is, as Noble would say, rather more 'genial'. If Starker suggests the candour of the Confessional, Fournier prefers the intimacy of a one-to-one conversation.

**CG** Absolutely, and it's that intimacy that draws the line between being 'grand' (as Noble describes Fournier) and 'grandiose', which is for me the defining difference of Fournier's approach. Starker's version I have always thought was too mannered to allow you to hear the direction of the music

#### **CLASSICS RECONSIDERED**

Third Suite. With both Fournier and Starker the opening is like a regal announcement, before the 'rising and falling' process takes over. Fournier in particular employs expressive inflections, shifting grades of dynamic and pulse that sway as the music proceeds. And when that noble arpeggiated passage arrives at the centre of the movement (at around 1'47") you sense the musical point of the preceding journey. It's as if Fournier has been taking in the exquisite tiny detail before facing some impressive raised vista ahead of him. Impressive and effective though Watkin is, I find myself frustrated that the path he travels - or dances around - precludes the sort of rich nuancing that Fournier achieves. I listen (as I listen to so many modern versions of the suites) and in my mind's ear, Fournier keeps calling me home. I have to admit that I'm more than happy to follow his lead.

**CG** This sort of difference in opinion is one of the things I enjoy most about discussing recordings of these pieces! The opening prelude of the Third Suite on David Watkin's recording is for me the perfect example of the combination of modern approaches and Fournier's more regal approach. That exact point at 1'47" I think is glossed over by the vast majority of recent performers (I have never understood why – perhaps to overcompensate for its obvious grandness), but transformed into a moment of heart-stopping joy by Watkin in a way that I closely associate with Fournier.

RC Listening to Watkin might have proved a bit of a culture shock, but what's the use of a culture that can't withstand being shocked? I now hear the music differently, even though my loyalty to Fournier remains intact. I was fortunate in that my first exposure to these suites was the young Starker's vibrant Period (ie Saga) recording of four of the suites (1950s) and my second the very different Casals, ruminative, emphatic, sighing, and achingly personal. So when I first heard Fournier he seemed to provide an ideal bridge between Starker's visceral attack and Casals's charismatic characterisation.

**CG** Yes, it's a 'middle line' that can stamp recordings such as the Watkin and Fournier with the word 'iconic', I think, and define them as such by their ability to bridge the gaps between changing fashions of performance. They create a warm sense of familiarity between the listener and the music and, for me, that is not only what Fournier does but is also the reason it has stood the test of time. **G** 



- the *sforzandos* at the beginnings of phrases feel rather like being musically spoon-fed in a way that not many cellists would consider appropriate now – but the warmth in Fournier's playing is so generous that it is easy to forgive the passages where his tempos can slip. I also think that 'genial' is an interesting choice of word, implying friendliness without any real substance, when Fournier's playing is so much more than that. The confidentiality of the one-to-one conversation that one feels Fournier is looking for is far more modern than it is easy to give credit for when looking back with the benefit of hindsight at recordings that are nearly 60 years old.
- **RC** Or is it? Many modern players prefer to prioritise the dance element. I was just listening to Tim Hugh's absorbing set of the suites (LSO Live) - light, lissom, quite carefree in places. Julius Berger (his later version) is another good example of this pirouetting trend. The kind of intensity that Fournier brings to virtually every note – a glow that's almost palpable - isn't within these current players' remit. Routes to musical emotion are various, and Fournier's isn't theirs. I'm an admirer of Steven Isserlis's Hyperion set. He is more demonstrably purposeful than most of the 'period' players; I'd say he edges around Fournier's zone, as does Yo-Yo Ma, though in some of the slower music he tends to smooth away some of the edges. I know that

'talking vibrato' tends to inspire either approving smiles or dismissive frowns, but it is such a vital aspect of Fournier's expressive equipment, not to mention Starker's, Tortelier's and Maurice Gendron's. Their sharing is in the way they sing, which means being vibrant as well as flexible.

- **CG** I absolutely agree that the dance element is what you are more likely to find being prioritised in modern recordings of the suites, and I also think that's the right way to go. They are collections of dance movements above all else, and if you ignore their identities as such you will also be ignoring the skill with which Bach was able to do so much with such a simple brief. But, while Fournier favours warmth over the dance element, I don't think that necessarily undermines the value of his recording in terms of how we perceive the suites overall, or even divides it absolutely from versions made decades later. David Watkin's Gramophone Award-winning version of 2015 is superlative for me because, at the same time as retaining the fleetness of foot needed for dance music, he creates a warmth and intimacy of sound that has more in common with Fournier than any number of his own contemporaries.
- **RC** I take what you say about Watkin though there are some movements where for me the approach is just a little too unceremonious. Take the Prelude in the

# THE SPECIALIST'S GUIDE TO...

## Animals in music

There are the usual suspects by Saint-Saëns, Prokofiev, Sibelius, Elgar, Vaughan Williams and so on, but here **Harriet Smith** digs deep to find a host of less obvious examples of pieces inspired by the animal kingdom

omposers through the centuries have found great delight in depicting animals and birds of all shapes and sizes, domesticated or otherwise, real and imaginary. For some, it seems to bring a return to innocence, yielding music of almost childlike simplicity. For others, it becomes profoundly symbolic. Messiaen was not merely an obsessive ornithologist; for him, birds had a quasi-spiritual dimension too. You can't help sensing

that he and St Francis of Assisi would have got along swimmingly.

But what happens when we go beyond the obvious? I don't mean simply the almost tediously ubiquitous *Le carnaval des animaux* or *Peter and the Wolf* (which is not to denigrate their inventiveness) but also the trouts of this world, ascending larks, Finnish swans and safely grazing sheep. Or examples such as the 11th of Elgar's *Enigma* Variations, in which Dan the dog plays a starring and comic role (Elgar was

a great dog lover but his wife, Alice, was not, so it was only after her death that Marco and Mina arrived in his life). Songs *about* animals also seem a little too easy. But discounting all that, there are some wonders to be found, both within well-known works and further off the beaten track. For some reason there's a particularly rich vein of animals portrayed in French music – who knows why? If they rather dominate what follows, I make no apology. **G** 



An illustration from Jean de La Fontaine's fables by François Chauveau (1613-76); the stories were used by Poulenc as the basis of his ballet Les animaux modèles

BHOTOGRAPHY: BRIVATE COLLECTION/LEEMAGE/BRIDGEMAN IMA



F Couperin Le moucheron Angela Hewitt pf Hyperion (5/13)

François Couperin could

probably have written a piece about a slice of cold toast, so richly inventive are his sets of keyboard *ordres*, with their delightful mixture of subject matter – people, plants, animals, and sometimes quite deliberately obscure. The sixth *ordre* concludes with 'Le moucheron', an all-toobelievable depiction of a gnat as it buzzes around the listener. Angela Hewitt proves that it is just as annoying (and effective) on the piano as it is on the more nasal harpsichord.



Telemann
Konzertierende Frösche
und Krähen

**Akademie für Alte Musik Berlin** Harmonia Mundi (9/99)

Telemann could give any French composer a run for his (or her) money when it came to populating his music with colourful characters. Who could resist his *Alster* Suite (TWV55:F11), which celebrates the Alster river, near Hamburg, and whose seventh movement is an ear-tickling 'Concert of Frogs and Crows'? Much of the comic effect comes from the slithering writing for oboes, horns and bassoon, wonderfully brought to life by the superb Akademie players.



Grieg Schmetterling Stephen Hough pf Hyperion (6/15)

Yes, butterflies are pretty much two a penny in terms of composerly depictions. But few capture the poignantly fleeting quality of their lifespan and the ethereal busyness of beating wings quite as beautifully as Grieg in the first of his Op 43 *Lyric Pieces*, which fittingly passes by in under two minutes. He conjures an airborne quality through largely high-lying writing, descending only at the very close, and for sheer delicacy Stephen Hough is, among modern-day pianists, simply miraculous.



Messiaen
Le merle noir
Emmanuel Pahud fl
Eric Le Sage pf
EMI (3/98)

Avoiding the obvious (not least the veritable 'Yellow Pages' of ornithology that is *Catalogue d'oiseaux*), how fascinating instead to alight on Messiaen's first work to draw largely on birdsong, *Le merle noir* (so much more poetic than 'The Blackbird') for flute and piano. It far transcends its origins as a test piece for the class of 1952 at the Paris Conservatoire. Messiaen uses everything from flutter-tonguing to wholesale cadenzas to convey the complexity of the original song.



## Ravel L'enfant et les sortilèges Soloists; Motet Choir of Geneva; Suisse Romande

Orchestra / Ernest Ansermet

Decca (6/55)

Forget the human element in Ravel's fairytale opera: the real heroes of the piece are from the animal kingdom. And so it is in the second part, set in the nocturnal garden, that they truly come into their own, from the dragonfly's ethereal waltz to the piquant characterisation of frogs and squirrels. But ultimately Ravel's genius lies in making us care about the fate of even the humblest creature.



Attrib Rossini

Duetto buffo di due gatti

Elisabeth Söderström sop

Kerstin Meyer sop Jan Eyron pf

BIS (9/93)

Rossini is usually held responsible for this 'Comic Duet for Two Cats', the ultimate of catfights, each singer trying to outdo the other, armed with just a single word of text: 'Miau'. But in fact it was probably the work of a now-obscure English composer, Robert Lucas Pearsall (1795-1856), who wrote it under a pseudonym. No matter: for a superb display of claws, just sample the pairing of Söderström and Meyer, born in Stockholm a year apart.



# Schoenfield Dog Heaven Jeffrey Kahane pf New World Symphony / John Nelson Argo (6/94)

Each movement of Paul Schoenfield's Four Parables for piano and orchestra draws on a reallife experience, from the gruesome to the joyously fanciful. The fourth is 'Dog Heaven', written to cheer up two children whose mother had got rid of the family pet. Schoenfield's brilliantly jubilant jazz piece depicts, as he puts it, 'a place where the streets are lined with bones and there is a fire hydrant on every corner'; its ebullience is fabulously caught here in 1992 - Argo at its best.



## Gersbwin Promenade (Walking the Dog) Jack Gibbons pf ASV White Line (1/98)

A dog has to learn to walk

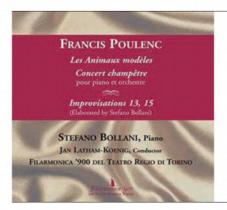
before it can dance, and that's where Gershwin's 'Promenade' comes in. It was composed for the film *Shall We Dance*, a vehicle for Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers. Through the simplest of rhythms and the catchiest of melodies Fred woos Ginger, aided by a veritable pack of dogs. It says much for Gershwin's invention that it works just as well in this solo piano version as in orchestral garb, as Jack Gibbons delightfully proves in this 1997 recording (nla, but available on YouTube).



#### *Krása* Brundibár

Collegium Juvenum, Mädchenkantorei St Eberhard / Friedemann Keek EDA

Some of the most extraordinary music comes out of the darkest of circumstances. None more so than Hans Krása's opera *Brundibár*, first performed at Theresienstadt. A brother and sister overcome Brundibár (symbolising Hitler) with the help of a sparrow, a cat and a dog. With a motley line-up of instruments at his disposal, Krása used their very oddness to create a characterful and beguiling score. Keek coaxes from his musicians a touching performance.



#### Poulenc

**Les animaux modèles** Filarmonica '900 del Teatro Regio di Torino / Jan Latham-Koenig Avie (12/07)

Like Brundibár, Poulenc's ballet Les animaux modèles came into being in a time of great darkness. With Paris under Nazi occupation, it was no accident that Poulenc based his work on the tales of archetypal French writer Jean de La Fontaine (1621-95). Each animal – ranging from a grasshopper to a bear, not to mention an amorous

lion and two fighting roosters – is vivaciously and affectionately brought to life by the musicians on this recording. In the last number Poulenc adds a subversive touch: the anti-German song 'Vous n'aurez pas l'Alsace et la Lorraine', which, luckily for him, was not spotted by German soldiers attending the Paris Opéra premiere in 1942.

# THE GRAMOPHONE COLLECTION

## Bach's Flute Sonatas BWV1030-1035

**Caroline Gill** surveys available recordings of these accompanied sonatas, which present a minefield in terms of dating, attribution and instrumentation, reflecting Bach's uncertain relationship with the flute

here has long been disagreement about whether Bach did or did not know very much about the flute, and still further dissent about whether he was particularly interested in it. One thing is definitely true: the Six Flute Sonatas, BWV1030-1035 (written over an extended period beginning possibly as early as 1718 and ending in 1741), are technically troublesome for any flautist, whether Baroque or modern. It is easy to wonder whether this awkwardness is due to Bach's limited experience and understanding of the flute's technical strengths and limitations; to the fact that the flute simply wasn't an instrument that inspired his imagination in the way that stringed and keyboard instruments did; or to the composer simply having access to the services of a particularly skilful flautist of whom we know nothing.

By 1741, Bach had written the vast majority of his cantatas, both Passions, the accompanied violin sonatas and the unaccompanied sonatas and partitas, and he was becoming increasingly interested in the burgeoning *stile galant*. That is not to say that the flute sonatas are grouped in date order: despite much research, scholars can only reach a general consensus on when (and, even, by whom) they were written. They are always, however, grouped in two sets of three. Generally speaking, BWV1031 and 1032 are of doubtful origin and are known as the 'obbligato' sonatas (BWV1030 is also grouped with these, but

it has its own issues when it comes to its origins); and BWV1033-1035, which are referred to as the 'continuo' sonatas, are considered more likely to have been written by Bach, although there will probably always be disagreement over their authorship – BWV1033, in particular.

The fact that CPE Bach wrote a single unaccompanied flute partita (dated 1747) in the A minor of his father's only unaccompanied Flute Partita (BWV1013, possibly 1718) suggests that he wanted to complete a sonata-partita pair in the manner of his father's complete set for violin. That appreciation of IS Bach's obsession with the structures of the musical forms he held most dear in turn indicates that perhaps he saw the flute as a far more important instrument than many have given him credit for. It is true that Bach knew few flautists but, equally, the idea that a piece of particular difficulty would have been written for a particular performer does not fully apprehend how Bach worked. He wrote extensively and speculatively 'for the use of youth eager to learn' as much as 'for the delight of those advanced in the art' (as he says on the title page of the Well-tempered Clavier). So, to that end, it is possible - and an exciting thought that that solo flute sonata may have been intended as the first entry in a set like those he wrote for solo violin and solo cello. And, if that is true, perhaps this set of sonatas for flute and harpsichord



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Similar to the violin and cello sonatas, the melodies of the flute sonatas are very rangy, and on an instrument as delicate as the flute they can easily become unusually graceless for Bach. On first examination, too, one would think that the best counteracting agent to this problem would be the silvery singing voice of the modern

flute. Certainly, the earlier recordings of Jean-Pierre Rampal with Robert Veyron-Lacroix and Jean Huchot (1962) are incandescent with the enthusiasm that rekindled interest in these pieces in the early 1960s. James Galway's recording of 1995 with Phillip Moll on harpsichord and Sarah Cunningham on viola da gamba, too, is certainly concerned above all with searching out the possibility for lyricism in the music in a way that feels surprisingly in line with what Bach may have wanted, albeit with a balance of parts that leans



Jean-Pierre Rampal, whose 1962 recording remains among the finest in the catalogue today

disproportionately and inexplicably towards the gamba. William Bennett, George Malcolm and Michael Evans's version (1978) has similar balance issues, with a resulting less sympathetic sense of three instruments brought together to compete, rather than collaborate.

Bach wrote these sonatas for flauto traverso at a time when the recorder was losing ground to the new 'transverse' flute, and he would have seen not only the opportunity to play with new sonorities but also the basic change in direction of technical difficulties. Although Rampal's and Galway's greatest achievement is the way they scale the subtle but exhausting heights of the musical challenges, they are, conversely, limited by the fact that they are playing instruments that are as unintended for these sonatas as the modern piano is for the Well-tempered Clavier. Unless the player overcompensates for the different sound often compromising what their own instrument has to offer in the process the effect can often be that of using a

#### **BEST HISTORIC VERSION**

Rampal / Veyron-Lacroix / Huchot Regis S RRC1414

The reason why this recording is so engaging after more than 50 years has



something to do with the articulacy of Rampal's musical language, his contagious enjoyment and warmth, and the at-once identifiable tone.

sledgehammer to crack a nut (particularly well evidenced in Grzegorz Cimoszko and Richard Fuller's very loud and almost entirely unnuanced recording of 2014).

As an antidote, the harpsichord as accompanying keyboard is drafted in to most modern-period hybrid performances, and usually with some success. In 2008, Emanuel Pahud and Trevor Pinnock (with Jonathan Manson on the cello) take a far more laid-back approach than others who use the modern flute, with engaging and considered Baroque ornamentation that takes away the overwhelming need for the vibrato that so many modern players inject into this music in lieu of Baroque flute colour. That lack of intensity, though, comes with a concomitant sense that Pahud does not quite find the kernel of the raw musicality of the sonatas, try as Pinnock might to encourage him there. But the recording of Jennifer Stinton, with David Wright and Guy Johnston (made 2013), gets far closer to divining the subtleties that Bach injected into his writing for the flute.

#### **BEST MODERN VERSION**

Oliva / Hewitt Hyperion © CDA67897 Oliva's playing is enormously vocal, almost

like a cantata's obbligato flute part. There is real democracy in the division of musical



importance between the performers, whose very gentle playing gives this an air of authenticity, as does Hewitt's intelligent and subtle realisation of the figured bass.

Although the tone and pace are less intense than on other modern recordings, the gentle and constant direction towards the ends of phrases is so fundamentally Bachian that it is impossible not to engage with, and enjoy, this version.

Susan Rotholz and Kenneth Cooper also go some way towards investigating what it is that is lacking in a performance on modern flute in their interesting 2002 recording with fortepiano. Although there may be some justification for the use of fortepiano in the increasing interest Bach was showing in the stile galant by the 1730s and '40s, the combination of modern flute and fortepiano is more of a curiosity than an enlightened way into these works. Besides, although Bach was known to admire its sound, he also dismissed the fortepiano frequently on the basis of the sound being too weak in the higher register and for being too cumbersome to play. It's hardly the sort of instrument he would have chosen to involve in his ongoing project to create matching sets of sonatas for the violin, the cello and the flute.

Ultimately, the limited scope of sound of the modern flute tends to leave players searching for back doors into the music and its expression when, knowing Bach, it should all be there on the page in plain sight. Two notable exceptions, though, are recordings by Andrea Oliva and Philippa Davies. Oliva's 2013 recording with Angela Hewitt is particularly gentle, with a democracy of playing that represents the division of importance of the players. To a certain extent, all this does is take the pressure off the modern flute, whose sonorities are not varied enough to manage these extraordinarily subtle works; but Oliva is very vocal in his playing - the melody lines sing in a way that would not be out of place in the cantatas. Hewitt's realisation of the figured bass in the continuo sonatas, too, is insightful at the same time as being light and in no way overstated. Similarly, Davies's playing (2006) is profoundly musical and delicate (the sound darkened and rounded by the fact that her modern flute is made of wood)

#### **RUNNER-UP**

Hazelzet / Ogg / ter Linden

Glossa (B) (2) GCD C80807

The perfect tuning and comfortable tempos already make this a superior choice, but its



greatest virtue is Hazelzet's non-egotistical nurturing of the music. It's a near winner, despite use of the fortepiano in the later sonatas (an acquired taste).

and vastly enhanced by the addition of Maggie Cole and Alison McGillivray – then, as now, two of the best continuo players in the business.

### WITH OR WITHOUT BOWED CONTINUO?

Once the question of whether it is better to use a modern or a Baroque flute for these sonatas is settled (because the instruments are so different, listeners simply have to agree to disagree and make a decision based on personal taste), the further question of whether or not bowed continuo should be used raises itself. This is less an issue of the sound of the instrument and more the basis of a discussion about whether the flute sonatas should be listened to as chamber music, with the space for an additional, separate continuo part, or as substantial pieces of music exclusively for single-line instrument and keyboard, to be treated in a similar way to the accompanied violin sonatas.

Furthermore, Bach's chamber music was profoundly influenced by his organ music, which was not only the absolute essence of his compositional style but also effectively functioned as the breeding ground for his three-part writing. So, to that end, the accompanied sonatas, whether they be for violin, cello or flute, can also be seen as trio sonatas 'according to JS Bach'. You may only be able to hear two instruments, but Bach's sonata writing was typical of his insatiable desire to learn, understand, change and perfect. The flute sonatas are a wildly varied set of pieces that heralded the dawn of the Classical period years before it began, and to bring out the cheeky dialogue between the three parts is to bring out the joy in them. It tends to be the case that if there is no sense of the banter that should come from a fugue, then no joy will follow either, and Stephen Preston's 1997 recording with Trevor Pinnock and Jordi Savall has the sense of a performance not comfortable in its own skin. There is an underbalance of the gamba, and Preston tends to find the tone colours that he's looking for in a vibrato that would be more at home on the modern flute. As a result, the performance is uncomfortable and oddly joyless. It illustrates how, as in life, three can be a crowd, for if two of those three parts are held entirely under the aegis of the keyboard, a third member of the group can easily sound superfluous. Moving it disproportionately forward in the texture is not the answer, but unless it does something to earn its keep it tends to betray itself as what it is: little more than a doubling of the left hand of the keyboard.



Hazelzet, Ogg and ter Linden: profound understatement

#### **OLD IS BEST**

One of the greatest issues with the development of the flute from the Baroque flauto traverso into its distant, modern, metal cousin – and one of the simplest illustrative examples of its corrosive effect – is that every time a modern player wants to create a change in tone or colour they add some vibrato. This is the case in every modern recording here (the sublime versions by Davies and Oliva included), and

it fudges some of the most important opportunities that Bach has for the investigation of sonority in his writing for the flute.

The way a Baroque flute player turns the end of a sentence defines its meaning, and conversely this is where they will also find the greatest danger points for the notoriously irresolute tuning of the instrument. Unless the tone is maintained at the ends of phrases, the intonation will sag so badly as to create a proper harmonic clash with the accompaniment. The dream-team recording (2001) of Lisa Beznosiuk, Paul Nicholson and Richard Tunnicliffe (with Elizabeth Kenny on the archlute for BWV1035) doesn't always stay on the right side of that line, but the love and understanding to be found in Beznosiuk's playing, and in the warmth of the ensemble, more than make up for that, despite the fact that there is a tendency to favour the flute sound over that of its chamber music colleagues. There is also the sparsest of ornamentation to be found here, as well as very precise rhythm, which

brings out the keen attention Beznosiuk pays to the counterpoint but which can leave it a little uncompromising.

Barthold Kuijken (with Ewald Demeyere, 2002), however, keeps such a tight rein on the tuning that any interpretative enquiry is directed towards the rhythm alone (which is played around with so much that it is akin more to the rhythm of the Swingle Singers than to that of period-performance

#### SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

DATE/	ARTISTS	RECORD COMPANY (REVIEW DATE)
1962	Rampal f/ Veyron-Lacroix hpd Huchot vc	Regis (S) RRC1414; Erato (S) (23 discs) 2564 61904-2 (10/15)
1971	<b>Korneyev</b> fl Bakhchiev hpd	Melodiya (M) (2) MELCD100 2154
1978	Bennett fl Malcolm hpd Evans vc	Resonance (E) CDRSN3008 (10/78 <sup>R</sup> , 7/79 <sup>R</sup> )
1983	Hazelzet* fl Bouman hpd/fp Linden vc	Archiv (\$) (5) 447 713-2AX5
1995	Galway f/ Moll hpd Cunningham va da gamba [Nos 1, 2, 4-6]	RCA M → 09026 62555-2
1997	Preston* fl Pinnock hpd Savall bass va da gamba	CRD (B) (2) CRD3314/5 (1/90)
1998	<b>Gérard</b> fl Azzolini bn Blumenthal pf Kleiner pf	Hänssler 🖲 ② HAEN92 121
1998	Solomon* fl Charlston hpd	Channel Classics (F) (2) CCS15798, CCS18498 (5/01 - oas)
2001	<b>Beznosiuk*</b> fl Nicholson hpd Tunnicliffe vc Kenny archlute	Hyperion (§ (2) CDD22077
2001-02	<b>Hazelzet</b> * <i>fl</i> Ogg <i>hpd/fp</i> ter Linden <i>vc</i>	Glossa ® @ GCD C80807 (2/03 <sup>R</sup> )
2002	<b>B Kuijken*</b> fl Demeyere hpd [Nos 1, 3-6]	Accent (F) ACC22150 (8/03)
2002	Rotholz fl Cooper fp	Bridge (M) (2) BRIDGE9115
2006	Davies fl Cole hpd McGillivray vc [Nos 1-3, 5, 6]	Avie (F) AV2101 (A/06)
2008	Pahud fl Pinnock hpd Manson vc	EMI ® 2 217443-2 (3/09)
2013	<b>Oliva</b> <i>fl</i> Hewitt <i>pf</i> [Nos 1, 2, 4-6]	Hyperion (E) CDA67897 (6/13)
2013	<b>Stinton</b> fl Wright hpd Johnston vc	Alto (S) (2) ALC2022
2014	Cimoszko fl Fuller hpd	Gramola (M) (2) 98993
2016	Holtslag* fl Haugsand hpd	Aeolus 🖲 AE10246
	* Baroque flui	te



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Top choice: Ashley Solomon brings out Bach's melodies like no other flautist in his 1998 recording

contemporaries) and away from any variation in colour, for fear of sagging tone. The playing of **Peter Holtslag** and Ketil Haugsand in 2016 may also keep the tuning on the straight and narrow, but they pull around the phrasing and tempos into a *rubato* which drains those cantata-like melodies that – once unlocked – make these sonatas into such hidden gems. And it is the melodies, ultimately, that make the sonatas so special.

Bach – who, if nothing else, was a speculative composer - had met the famous French flautist Buffardin in 1717, just before the probable date of composition of his one unaccompanied Partita (BWV1013). It is almost unthinkable that after that first meeting he wouldn't have considered writing for the flute. Buffardin (who was probably the first major flute player that Bach had met) played a French instrument and had been nurtured by French repertoire – a tradition defined at that time by light textures; dance-inspired rhythms and forms; and uninhibited beauty of melody. Therefore, mightn't Bach have wanted to look to this style, so fresh and new to him, when writing for an instrument with which he had only a newly discovered acquaintance, rather than impressing on it all that compositional rigour and sophistication that came so easily to him?

The versions by Alexander Korneyev with Alexander Bakhchiev (1971; on modern flute, with harpsichord) and Jean-Claude Gérard (1998; also on modern flute, but with a wooden headjoint that makes little discernible difference to the sound, and two different piano accompanists plus bassoon) both approach the music from the sort of intellectual perspective that may be well applied to the Well-tempered Clavier, but which leaves the fundamentally more sunny and joyful disposition that was driving the composition of the flute sonatas conspicuous by its absence.

#### **WE NEED TO TALK ABOUT BWV1034**

In some works - or collections of works there is often a single section or movement that is defining: a central point where all the features of the whole are to be found in their most concentrated form. How well the overall performance stands up can hinge totally on that one small element, and in the set of six flute sonatas the Adagio of BWV1034 is that movement. It was written in 1724, just after Bach had left his happy tenure at Cöthen and arrived in Leipzig, and coincided with a sudden proliferation of extensive flute obbligato parts in his cantatas, so it can be assumed that when he arrived in his new job he found one of his new colleagues (either visiting or resident) to be a proficient flautist.

Of all six sonatas, this is the one that has the most in common with the style and emotional range of the arias that Bach was writing for voice at the same time, and the best recordings are those that pinpoint the purely lyrical nature of its melodies. Wilbert Hazelzet, Jacques Ogg and Jaap ter Linden managed that beautifully in 2001-02, with performances that are so understated that they make it impossible not to want to crane your ear to hear what it is that they hear. There are times, though, when it is perhaps a little too introverted, and can become a little ponderous - in speed, balance between the instruments and even sometimes in its seeming lack of commitment to a particular interpretative position. That may, though, be a reaction against Hazelzet's earlier recording of 1983, which shows the green shoots of the extreme beauty of the later performance, but with many more mannerisms that give it a slight sense of self-consciousness and which as a result interfere with the unfolding of the melody. And unfolding is what it does: if there is any movement in this glorious and undervalued set of sonatas that sounds like

The melody is the closest to vocal to be found in this set already bursting with melodies that sound like they could as easily have been conceived for the human voice, and it is Ashley Solomon's 1998 recording (on two volumes released separately) with Terence Charlston that comes closest to exploring their endless possibilities. In the slow movements, soulful in their infinite variety, and the fast ones, clever and with a wealth of invention behind them, Solomon treads a more confident line than does Hazelzet: the disarming directness of his presentation of the Andante-Presto that opens BWV1033, for instance, feels more like the opening of a trio sonata for organ; and the crucial Adagio of BWV1034, with Charlston's unusual choice to accompany the flute with the harpsichord on the lute stop with no reverberation at all, has the unmistakable and unabashed romance of a troubadour song. 6

an uninhibited love song, it is this one.

#### **BEST OVERALL VERSION**

#### Solomon / Charlston

Channel Classics (F) (2) CCS15798, CCS18498

From BWV1033's first movement - the melody like silver thread unwinding from a bobbin -



to the crucial Adagio of BWV1034, Solomon's luminous tone and unfussy command of the complicated melodies conflate into something utterly beautiful.

## PERFORMANCES & EVENTS

Presenting live concert and opera performances from around the world, and reviews of archived music-making available online to stream when you want, where you want

#### Barbican Hall, London & BBC Radio 3

#### Violinist Carolin Widmann premieres Zev Gordon's concerto, February 3, broadcast on February 6

This Barbican concert from the BBC Symphony Orchestra contains the world premiere of a BBC commission, British composer Michael Zev Gordon's Violin Concerto. Carolin Widmann, a violinist known for her championing of new music, performs as soloist, conducted by the orchestra's Chief Conductor, Sakari Oramo. Then, the rest of the programme looks equally powerful, the evening opening with Kabalevsky's rip-roaring *Colas Breugnon* Overture, and climaxing with Shostakovich's Symphony No 10.

bbc.co.uk/symphonyorchestra/events

#### Royal Festival Hall, London & BBC Radio 3

### Sir Roger Norrington conducts Haydn's The Creation, February 4, broadcast February 13

This season Southbank Centre and the London Philharmonic Orchestra present the highly anticipated festival, 'Belief and Beyond Belief', exploring the music, art, culture,

science, philosophy, ritual and traditions that have arisen from religion in its various forms, along with the broader question of what it means to be human. The classical music repertoire on offer is an eclectic and ambitious spread, with some wonderful guest artists, and while this performance of Haydn's *The Creation* is one of the season's guaranteed crowd-pleaser concerts, its artist line-up makes it one of the must-sees; Sir Roger Norrington conducts the LPO and Choir, with soloists Susan Gritton (soprano), Thomas Hobbs (tenor) and Christopher Maltman (baritone).

#### lpo.org.uk, bbc.co.uk/radio3

### Royal Opera House, Covent Garden & UK cinemas

#### Woolf Works, February 8

When Woolf Works, Wayne McGregor's new production for the Royal Ballet based on three novels of Virginia Woolf, premiered in May 2015, it was greeted with cheers and a standing ovation, so you can be sure that it's worth catching in this first revival. It's split into three parts, the first based on Mrs Dalloway,

the second on *Orlando* and the third on *The Waves*, all set to a commissioned score by Max Richter (incidentally, 'Three Worlds', music from *Woolf Works* has just been released by DG). Much of the original cast are also back, including 54-year-old former Royal Ballet Principal Alessandra Ferri, who reprises her highly acclaimed role of Clarissa. The Royal Ballet's Music Director Koen Kessels conducts. **roh.co.uk/showings** 

#### Barbican Hall, London & BBC Radio 3

Final concert of Jonas Kaufmann's Barbican residency, February 13, broadcast February 17
Tenor Jonas Kaufmann begins his two-week Barbican residency on February 4 with a voice and piano recital far removed from the big operatic roles for which he's become such a superstar. Next up is a Wagner programme with the LSO on February 8, and while you'll be lucky to secure tickets to these events now, the concluding concert of his residency is available to everyone thanks to BBC Radio 3 recording it for broadcast. It sees him perform Strauss's Four Last Songs with the BBC SO

#### ONLINE OPERA REVIEW

#### A Russian operatic rarity is brought stylishly to life by Laurent Pelly at Brussels's La Monnaie

#### Rimsky-Korsakov

Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov's *The Legend of the Invisible City of Kitezh and the Maiden Fevroniya* (1905) was supposed to be his last opera, a Parsifalian opus ultimum. It ended up, however, being followed by *The Golden Cockerel* (1907), a biting Pushkin-based satire inspired by a cocktail of political events at the start of the 20th century. Due to its controversial subject, *The Golden Cockerel* didn't make it to the stage until 1909, a year after the composer's death.

The score is typically inventive, full of folk inflections plus 'oriental' touches to convey the exoticism of the Shamankhan realm ineptly attacked by Tsar Dodon. The Tsar is inspired to embark on his foolhardy campaign by the prophetic titular bird (a gift from his Astrologer) sung here by Sheva Tehoval and danced by Sarah Demarthe.

Laurent Pelly's grown-up production underplays local colour, perhaps, opting for a muted palette of greys. The action, apparently played out as the dozy Tsar's surreal and occasionally nightmarish dream, takes place on a pile of rubble. It's all a tad OPERAS COLLECTIONS CONTRIBUTORS COMING SOON

Q EN

## Rimsky-Korsakov - THE GOLDEN COCKEREL

austere, admittedly, but Pavlo Hunka's perpetually baffled Tsar keeps the comedy alive by bumbling through the protoabsurdist plot beautifully. Venera Gimadieva is ideally seductive as the Shamankhan Queen who uses her wiles to coax victory from the jaws of defeat. The rest of the large cast is excellent.

Alain Altingolu draws seductive, colourful playing from his Monnaie players. As a bonus, he even accompanies concertmaster Saténik Khourdoian in a musical interlude between Acts 2 and 3 – the Zimbalist/ Kreisler Fantasy on the opera. Hugo Shirley Available to view for free until June 22, 2017 at theoperaplatform.eu

#### ONLINE CONCERT REVIEW

#### Two major classical choral works by Haydn and Mozart, under René Jacobs, recorded at the Philharmonie de Paris

#### Haydn · Mozart

You can always rely on René Jacobs to find something new in a familiar piece of music. This concert was the opening night of a mini-tour with the Freiburg Baroque Orchestra (I caught it in Berlin), and presented the two final sacred masterpieces of Mozart and Haydn. Not in that order: the Philharmonie insisted on Mozart's Requiem taking the second half, with Haydn's *Harmoniemesse* to open. In Berlin it was the other way round, and Jacobs told me it was his intention to place the two works chronologically.

Whichever way round you prefer, the performances of both works were beautifully finished and, as ever with Jacobs, deeply thought through. The Haydn, for example, rested on its characteristic bed of woodwinds right until the 'Dona nobis', taken at a delicious speed that enabled the stunned militaristic fanfares to ricochet around, reminding us that, for all its mellifluous beauty, this is still a Mass in time of war.

Perhaps the biggest draw, though, was the Requiem, Mozart's final, unfinished Mass. Ever questing, Jacobs opted not for the standard 18th-century completion or



any of the established 20th-century ones, but a brand-new reimagination by Pierre-Henri Dutron. Dutron comes at the work as a composer rather than as a musicologist, and finds some radical and thought-provoking solutions to the problems posed by this tantalising fragment. His take on the Benedictus

especially will certainly give rise to debate! The RIAS Choir sing majestically and, among the soloists, soprano Sophie Karthäuser and bass Johannes Weisser are particularly memorable.

#### David Threasher

Available to stream for free until May 24, 2017 at live.philharmoniedeparis.fr/

under Jochen Rieder, and the programme also features Korngold's *Schauspiel Overture*, Richard Strauss's Symphonic Interlude from *Intermezzo*, and Elgar's concert overture, *In the South (Alassio)*.

bbc.co.uk/symphonyorchestra/events

#### Barbican Hall & BBC Radio 3

#### llan Volkov conducts LeFanu world premiere, February 17

The second world premiere performance from the BBC Symphony Orchestra this month is *The Crimson Bird*, the first full-scale orchestral work in three decades from Nicola LeFanu, who is celebrating her 70th birthday. Commissioned by the Royal Philharmonic Society, the work is a mother's lament for her son caught up in conflict, and was composed with the evening's soloist, Rachel Nicholls, in mind. Words are by the British poet John Fuller. Ilan Volkov conducts, and the other two works on the programme are Schrecker's interlude from his opera *Der ferne Klang*, and Rachmaninov's Symphony No 3.

bbc.co.uk/symphonyorchestra/events

#### Old Swan Hotel, Harrogate & online

Clarinettist Julian Bliss performs for the Harrogate International Festivals' Sunday Series, February 19 The Harrogate International Festivals' Sunday Series continues at Harrogate's Old Swan Hotel with a recital from Julian Bliss and pianist Robert Botterielli which will be live streamed as part of the festivals' new 'Library of Live' initiative. The programme is a very wide ranging one, including Schumann's Fantasiestücke, Op 73, Berg's Stücke Op 5 and Martinů's Sonatina, along with further works by Messager, Chopin and Brahms.

harrogateinternationalfestivals.com

#### Royal Festival Hall & live on BBC Radio 3

#### Vladimir Juroswski conducts Denisov's Symphony No 2, February 22

Another concert in Southbank Centre's 'Belief and Beyond Belief' festival, and this one features some unusual repertoire in the form of Edison Denisov's Symphony No 2, completed in 1996 shortly before his death. Also on the programme are Shostakovich's final symphony, No 15 of 1971, and Berg's Violin Concerto of 1935, written shortly before his own death and in memory of the daughter of Alma Mahler and Walter Gropius, who had just died from polio aged 18. Vladimir Jurowski conducts the LPO, with *Gramophone* Award winner Patricia Kopatchinskaja the soloist for the Berg.

lpo.org.uk, bbc.co.uk/radio3

### Metropolitan Opera, New York & cinemas worldwide

Rusalka, February 25

The Met's new production of Dvořák's Rusalka, directed by Tony Award winner and MacArthur Fellow Mary Zimmerman, stars Kristine Opolais in the title-role – it's especially worth making the effort to catch because it was as Rusalka that she made her international breakthrough six years ago, at the Bavarian State Opera. Singing alongside her are Katarina Dalayman as the Foreign Princess, Jamie Barton (whose new song recital is an Editor's Choice this month) as Ježibaba, Brandon Jovanovich as The Prince and Eric Owens as The Water Sprite. Dvořák expert Sir Mark Elder conducts.

metopera.org/Season/In-Cinemas

### Royal Opera House, Covent Garden & UK cinemas

#### The Sleeping Beauty, February 28

Yes, another Royal Ballet cinema showing, but this one a classic Tchaikovsky score and Marius Petitpa's classic, visually sumptuous production which celebrates its 70th birthday this year. Koen Kessel conducts a cast headed by Marianela Nuñez as Princess Aurora and Vadim Muntagirov as Prince Florimund.

roh.co.uk/showings

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THIS MONTH a superb pocket player for hi-res music on the move, the latest version of a classic DAC/headphone amp and why Samsung really wanted Harman. **Andrew Everard, Audio Editor** 

## Unashamedly high-end introductions

From a flagship player and amplifier to new speakers from a company best known for budget designs

ome months on from its first appearance, a system described by its maker as its 'New Reference' is finally ready to hit the shops. Marantz first showed its 'Premium 10' models at the 2016 High End show in Munich last May and, many months and lots of development work later, the two are ready to go on sale in the next month or two, at £5999 for the SA-10 SACD player/DAC and £6999 for the PM-10 amplifier 1.

The amplifier is all-analogue and designed as a pre-amp and a pair of mono power amplifiers, all in one box. Meanwhile the SA-10 will play CDs, SACDs, and higher-resolution audio files stored on DVD recordable media, using a brand-new disc mechanism of in-house construction.

It also has multiple digital outputs, including asynchronous USB, and uses a novel digital conversion system designed to upscale all digital signals to 'quad DSD' format, using technology the company has dubbed Marantz Musical Mastering. That done, this ultra-hi-res signal is essentially just passed through a very high-quality low-pass filter, for output to an amplifier.

While Marantz is aiming high with its new products, so too is Q Acoustics.



Working with design and engineering consultants in both Britain and Germany, the company has launched its flagship Concept 500, a floorstanding speaker selling at £3599 a pair 2. Standing 115cm tall, the speakers use twin 16.5cm mid/bass units with an extra-large 'motor' and a wide-dispersion 28mm tweeter designed to widen the ideal listening 'sweet spot'. The tweeter is mounted compliantly to the three-layer Gelcore cabinet, to avoid vibrations, and has a level control to allow +/-0.5dB adjustment using rear-panel jumpers. Gloss black or gloss white finishes are available, accented with a wood veneer to the rear.

If you've thought about copying your music to computer storage, the Red Dot Recording service offers to take away your LPs or CDs, clean them and then rip them to computer files, which are then returned to you on storage media along with your recordings. The service, which also takes care of all the metadata tagging required to ensure your new files are easily accessible, has been launched via outlets around parent company Convert Technologies' Derby HQ, but will be rolled out nationally.

Finally this month, the latest company to launch a product designed to simplify surround sound is Creative Technology, with its X-Fi Sonic Carrier 4. Comprising a soundbar and subwoofer using 17 drivers in an 11.2.4 configuration, it's able to handle the latest Dolby Atmos 'immersive surround' soundtracks, that last '.4' signifying four upwards-firing 'height channel' drivers. It uses proprietary technology called Superwide X-Fi to deliver surround soundtracks without the need for a rigid listening 'sweet spot', incorporates music streaming capability and - although UK pricing is not yet announced - looks set to be the company's most ambitious speaker to date. 6



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#### **FEBRUARY TEST DISCS**



The Bach Collegium Japan produces consistently wonderful recordings but this new reading of Mozart's 'Great' Mass in C minor sets new standards in 96kHz/24 bit.



Familiar music with a new twist: Tasmin Little's take on Vivaldi's The Four Seasons sees the music coming up fresh and exciting in hi-res.

#### REVIEW PRODUCT OF THE MONTH

## Onkyo DP-X1

It may share some technology with its Pioneer stablemate but this hi-res player is much more than a 'me too' machine

ecent years have seen all kinds of alliances formed in the consumer electronics industry, as companies have joined forces the better to weather the currently tricky market conditions and emerge stronger, and even once-fierce rivals have found themselves under the same 'roof'. One such alliance is that of Onkyo/Teac and Pioneer, now under the umbrella of musical instrument manufacturer Gibson Brands. Pioneer is a subsidiary of Onkyo now, and it's already possible to see commonalities of technology between the two brands' products, even if each strives to maintain its own identity.

So it is with the Onkyo DP-X1 digital audio player we have here, which clearly shares parentage with the Pioneer XDP-100R, reviewed in the August 2016 issue of Gramophone. The two are of similar dimensions, are both based on an Android operating platform, and each offers compatibility with both high-resolution audio all the way up to DSD 11.2MHz and 384kHz/24 bit PCM (for WAV and FLAC files), and the still-forthcoming MOA format.

However, there's a substantial price difference between the two, with the £600 Onkyo selling for 50 per cent more than its Pioneer stablemate, thus pitching it into the very big league against the excellent players from brands such as Astell & Kern. Clearly the Onkyo will need to be rather special to justify the price increase over the already excellent Pioneer, not to mention allowing it to hold its own against the 'external' competition.

Whether playing large-scale orchestral works or Joyce DiDonato's 'In War and Peace'. it sounds both compelling and completely at ease

Fortunately, the Onkyo is rather special. It may employ similar digital technology to the Pioneer, in the form of digital-toanalogue conversion from ESS and the same company's amplification for the analogue outputs, but it doubles up on both elements, not only giving it the noise reduction benefits of dual symmetrical conversion but also allowing fully balanced working – again giving better rejection of both noise and interference, as well as more power - for both headphones and analogue connection to a hi-fi system.

Twin ESS Sabre ES9018K2M DACs are used, along with a pair of Sabre 9601K amplifier modules, and the internal layout is designed to give short and equal signal

#### **ONKYO DP-X1**

Type Digital Audio Player Price £600

File formats played

DSD, MQA, FLAC, ALAC, WAV/AIFF, Ogg-Vorbis, MP3, AAC

#### Sampling rates and bit-depths played

44.1kHz-384kHz, 16 bit/ 24 bit; DSD2.8/5.6/11.2MHz 1 bit (sampling rates above 192kHz, DSD, and 44.1kHz

and its multiples via microUSB output)

Outputs 3.5mm stereo headphones/ analogue; 2.5mm balanced headphones/ analogue, microUSB for charging/file transfer/ digital out

Storage 32GB internal, two microSD slots (200GB max each)

Battery life 16 hours, rechargeable **Accessories supplied** USB cable Dimensions (HxWxD) 12.9x7.6x1.27cm

Weight 203a eu.onkyo.com

paths for each channel, for the best control and optimal stereo imaging. The internal layout also places both digital-to-analogue and amplifier sections on their own circuit boards, away from the main processor on which the operating system of the player runs, and uses separate power supplies for them - this is all in the quest for noise reduction.

The balanced output here is on a 2.5mm four-pole socket sitting beside the standard 3.5mm three-pole stereo analogue output,

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#### SUGGESTED **PARTNERS**

The Onkyo will work well with a wide range of headphones: here's a couple of suggestions...

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#### **OPPO PM-2**

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the player offering both standard balanced operation and Active Ground Control, creating a highly stable ground to give a more open, detailed sound. As yet suitable adaptors for this 2.5mm output - either for headphones supporting balanced connectivity or to feed amplifiers with balanced inputs – are a bit thin on the ground, but several manufacturers of DACs and digital audio players are starting to offer this connection, so you can be sure the cable companies will catch on fairly quickly. There are already suitable adaptors available from Chinese manufacturers, and they needn't be that expensive - around \$30 seems to be the going rate.

The Onkyo also offers a digital output on a micro USB socket usable with DACs compatible with the Android OTG (On The Go) standard, and will upsample all audio to DSD2.8 or DSD5.6, or to anything up to 384kHz or 352.8kHz for digital output, thus pushing any noise generated in the conversion process way outside the audible band. A range of digital filters and adjustments are also available, and it's possible to reduce the amount of processing going on while playing to optimise sound quality, using a Stand Alone Mode to turn off noise-creating functionality. In this mode the display and thus the onscreen volume controls are disabled, along with the built-in Wi-Fi and Bluetooth connectivity, and volume is adjusted using the little knob on the left side of the player. There are also 'physical' transport buttons on the right edge of the device, for play and track skip forwards and back, along with a power button, and the player offers three-stage gain to allow it to be used with a wide range of headphones.

The DP-X1 can even download music directly from the Onkyo Music store over Wi-Fi, as well as supporting a range of streaming services such as Spotify and Tidal, which can be added using the Google Play store built into the Android operating system. Indeed, that's one of the advantages of the fact that the player is built on a customised version of the same operating system found in millions of phones and tablets: it's easy to add on extra features as required.

That said, the built-in Onkyo music player is excellent, and the X-DAP

Link software does a fine job in finding, transferring and organising a music library onto the player. Finally, there's 32GB of internal storage, plus two microSD card slots, giving a total capacity of well over 400GB, located on the right side of the player.

#### **PERFORMANCE**

This is an exceptionally comprehensively equipped digital music player, despite simple, almost bland looks, lacking the frills of the Pioneer stablemate with its protective 'bumpers'. The Onkyo looks coolly functional until you light up its display, which is a superbly clear 4.7in 1280x720-pixel panel with responsive touch functionality. That combines with an intuitive menu system and clear artwork and function graphics to make the DP-X1 a pleasure to use.

Listening is also a pleasure, with the decent power on offer - 75mW per channel as standard or 150mWpc in balanced mode - combining with the clarity and dynamics of the ESS conversion and amplification to deliver a presentation that's as thrilling as it is refined.

Whether playing large-scale orchestral works such as the new San Francisco Symphony set of Debussy or the crystalline clarity of Joyce DiDonato's 'In War and Peace', the Onkyo sounds both entirely compelling and completely at ease, even when driving demanding high-quality headphones such as Oppo's original PM-1. It works extremely well with more affordable 'phones - I tried it with the Bowers & Wilkins P3s - and then goes on to shine as you up the stakes to the likes of the Focal Elear reviewed last month.

Even playing at high basic levels, the Onkyo still seems to have plenty in reserve should you want to go even louder, while its ability with the dynamics of demanding music is beyond reproach. The same goes when you use this little player as a source component for a 'full size' hi-fi system: yes, it's a little fiddly when used like this when compared with, say, a network player driven by its own app, but there are no such worries about the sound.

As already mentioned, the Onkyo is substantially more expensive than the Pioneer XDP-100R, with which it

#### Or you could try...

The Onkyo may have some unique features, not least of which is that ability to connect to amplifiers and headphones using a balanced connection, but its competitive pricing puts it up against some intense competition in the personal audio arena.

#### **Pioneer XD-100P**

One obvious rival is the XD-100P model from stablemate Pioneer, which offers a stripped-down version of the Onkyo's features including a simplified digital-to-analogue implementation and the deletion of the balanced

output facility. In return, you get a lower price, and still the same hi-res capability details at pioneer-audiovisual.eu/uk.

#### **Astell & Kern AK70**

The AK70 is one of the latest models in the fast-growing range from Astell &

Kern, which has a very strong position in the personal audio market. Finished in 'minty mist' green anodised aluminium, machined from a solid block, it supports hi-res audio, has upgradable storage as well as Bluetooth and Wi-Fi builtin, and can even function as a USB DAC for vour computer. More at astellnkern.com.

#### iPhone 7 and 7+

Finally, the latest versions of the 'do it all' iPhone, the 7 and 7+ court controversy by lacking a conventional headphone socket but come bundled with a converter cable to connect headphones to its Lightning port, and many manufacturers are working on Lightning-connected headphones. Find out more at apple.com/uk.

clearly shares much of its basic structure. However, the inescapable conclusion is that the higher price is more than justified by the extra performance on offer. **G** 

#### REVIEW AUDIOQUEST DRAGONFLY BLACK AND RED

## The tiny headphone amp splits in two

In its third generation, the US cable company's original USB DAC/headphone amplifier has now become two models - one at a bargain price, the other aiming somewhat higher

he original AudioQuest DragonFly was a somewhat remarkable product, and for a number of reasons. First, the company was previously best known as a vendor of a wide range of audio cables, from analogue interconnects and speaker cables all the way through to digital models. Second, the product itself was somewhat remarkable, combining as it did a digital-to-analogue converter and a headphone amplifier in one little device hardly larger than a USB memory stick, and designed to be plugged into a computer for use on the move. And finally, it was very competitively priced for a USB DAC, selling for £215.

For that, you got a DAC able to handle file formats up to 96kHz/24 bit – it could accept 192kHz but downsampled it to 96kHz – and with a colour-changing DragonFly logo to show the sampling rate being processed. Power came from the computer to which the device was connected, which also adjusted the volume, while the DragonFly could be used either as a headphone amplifier via its 3.5mm stereo output or – with a suitable cable – to connect the computer to the line inputs on a conventional amplifier.

AudioQuest followed up the original model with a '1.2' version, promising even shorter signal paths – yes, in a product this small! – and improved power supplies. Even more to the point, it sold for 40 per cent less than the original. Now we have two 'third generation' DragonFlies, in the form of the Black and Red models we have here, and the entrypoint has fallen again: the Black model sells for £89, while the more advanced Red version is still less than the original launch price, at £169.

Both use USB 1.0, so they can be used with a range of computers and other devices without the need for additional drivers on whatever they're connected to, and both still offer 96kHz compatibility. But what's very new is that AudioQuest has reduced the power consumption of the microcontroller in the new models to make them suitable for use with portable devices as well as computers (the old ones, using a TI microcontroller, were too powerhungry for anything other than laptops or desktop computers). The 77 per cent power



#### **AUDIOQUEST DRAGONFLY**

Type USB DAC/headphone amplifier Price £89 (Black), £169 (Red) Input USB, asynchronous

**File formats handled** PCM to 96kHz/24bit in native form, 192kHz downsampled

Output 3.5mm stereo Accessories supplied Case Dimensions (WxHxL) 1.2x1.9x6.2cm

audioquest.com

reduction ensures the new DragonFlies can also be used with Apple iOS and Android smartphones and tablets; to use them with iOS devices you'll also need the Apple Camera Connection Kit; for Android an 'On The Go' adaptor is required, such as the AudioQuest DragonTail.

#### What's very new is that AudioQuest has reduced the power consumption of the microcontroller

Both models use the acclaimed digital-to-analogue solutions of ESS, in the form of that company's Sabre 32 DACs, the suffix indicating that they are now 32-bit designs; but while the Black uses the ESS 9010 device, feeding an analogue volume adjustment driven by the software, the Red uses the bit-perfect digital adjustment built into its chipset.

The other main difference is in claimed headphone-driving ability: the Black is down about a third on output power when compared to the old 1.2 model, at 1.2V, while the more expensive Red claims a

2.1V output. Also new for both models is the ability to upgrade their software using the computer to which the device is connected, using a desktop app.

#### **PERFORMANCE**

Both models come in a leatherette carrying pouch, which is handy on the move, and have a pull-off cap to protect their USB connector, which is less so. Having lost the cover for my original DragonFly almost as soon as I started using it, I'd much prefer a tethered cap to make it harder to mislay, or maybe even a retractable USB connector, though I am sure space is at a premium inside the compact housings.

Expecting there to be clear water between the Black and Red models when it came to the volume levels available, I was disappointed when the greater power of the Red didn't seem to make it 'go louder' than the Black, and nor did the Red appear to have greater dynamic ability or grip on the headphones it was driving. I tried the two with a wide range of 'phones, both in-ear and on-ear, and from entry-level right the way up to some very serious models, and in both cases the driving ability of the two was much the same.

Mind you, I did also throw an original DragonFly – the one with the missing cap! – into the mix, and both versions showed themselves to be a step up in performance. In fact, the Black is perhaps only a shade better than the original, but the Red shows notably better clarity and detail across a range of music, from the simplest solo recordings through to the densest, most complex orchestral works. That's possibly due to the slightly simpler, shorter signal path within the more expensive model.

What sets the Red apart is the way it reveals the micro-details of a recording: not just the hi-fi niceties but the ambience and space of the recorded acoustic, and the finer nuances of the timbre of voices and instruments. Listen in a noisy environment and there's not much in it between the two, and indeed for most users on the move with modest headphones the Black would be more than sufficient, and an absolute bargain. However, with topnotch headphones and in ideal listening circumstances, the added quality of the Red model shines through. **6** 





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#### **ESSAY**

## 'The best thing Samsung can do with the highend brands it now owns is leave them well alone'

The twists and turns of who owns what in hi-fi continued throughout the past year

o it wasn't quite the deal we were expecting, but it was quite a deal! Back in November a story surfaced in the Korean business press that Samsung, the enormous familyowned company with interests in everything from cars to supermarkets to the consumer electronics for which it's best-known outside its home country, was considering buying the French speaker manufacturer Focal. Of course the rumour was swiftly denied - as seemed perfectly sensible to those of us wondering what on earth a company the size of Samsung would do with a relative minnow such as Focal – but not before those fanatical about both the French company and its British stablemate Naim had tied themselves in knots about this being the end of the world as they knew it.

However, when it emerged exactly what Samsung was actually buying – the US-based electronics giant Harman International – there was just as much handwringing about the future of the specialist audio brands in that company's fold. After all, while to some the company founded back in 1953 by Sidney Harman and Bernard Kardon is synonymous with the audio components still bearing their joint names, these days the Harman group also encompasses the likes of AKG, Infinity, JBL, Mark Levinson and Revel, each of which has a place in the hearts of huge numbers of audio enthusiasts.

One of the more recent Harman acquisitions was the in-car audio operations of Bang & Olufsen, which still operates under its new owners from within the walls of the B&O factory in Struer, Denmark, and this gives you a clue not only where a large part of the Harman business is focused, but also what attracted the bid from Korea of around \$8bn. Almost all of Harman's brands have an involvement in car audio, from JBL and Infinity through to Mark Levinson, and the company also owns German-based in-car 'infotainment' specialists Becker.

Indeed, a significant part of my interaction with the greater Harman group in recent years has been with its in-car



The future of productive commuting? The Rinspeed Etos

operations, from a demonstration of its Lexicon-based surround systems for BMW at Bray Studios here in England to a visit to Stuttgart to see how Mercedes-Benz audio systems are developed.

The good news is that the speciality audio brands in Samsung's new portfolio may well remain 'below' the radar

The list of companies with which Harman works starts with Audi and ends up at the other end of the VAG group with Volkswagen itself, taking in brands including BMW/Mini/Rolls-Royce, Fiat/Chrysler/Jeep, Jaguar Land Rover, Rolls-Royce and Toyota/Lexus along the way. These brands either offer systems bearing one of Harman's brand names, such as the Mark Levinson systems available in the Lexus, for example, or simply use the company's technology as part of their own-brand offering, such OEM systems being an enormous part of the worldwide consumer electronics market.

That's where the true interest in this deal is to be found, because these days electronic technology in cars goes much further than just a sound system, and Harman is a global leader in what used to carry that 'infotainment' label but is now better described as the concept of the connected car, or even the connected lifestyle.

That goes way beyond the obvious stuff already visible in some vehicles, with their

entertainment systems integrated into a navigation offering: it also encompasses internet connectivity, the way in which the car interacts with devices such as smartphones and tablets, and even a world in which your vehicle not only drives itself but also has a huge range of apps and more to help you use your commuting time more productively.

Harman gave a taste of this in the concept interior it showed for the Rinspeed Etos at last year's CES 2016 in Las Vegas. Taking as their starting point the BMW i8 hybrid electric supercar, the Swiss-based Rinspeed

engineers created an autonomous vehicle complete with advanced connectivity, two 21.5in ultra-widescreen HD displays on which the passenger could catch up with TV, read and send emails and all the rest, and an intelligent system designed to learn personal preferences and serve up suitable content. It even had a drone as part of the system, able to be deployed to pay tolls, pick up the shopping ordered from the car and so on!

If all this seems far-fetched, or even trivial, one need only look at the investment companies such as Apple are putting into automotive systems, and the rapid spread of lower-league connectivity even in entry-level vehicles these days, not to mention extended semi-autonomous driver assistance systems. If and when self-driving cars and other vehicles become not just a reality but the norm, it's clear that this technology is going to see explosive growth – after all, we'll need something to do apart from enjoying the music when we don't have to concentrate on controlling the car.

The good news from all this is that the speciality audio brands in Samsung's new portfolio may well remain somewhat 'below' the radar, and largely unaffected by the new ownership beyond hopefully having extra resources at their disposal. Which for audio enthusiasts can only be a good thing: the best thing Samsung can do is leave them well alone, while acknowledging their cachet and history and ensuring their survival. **G** 

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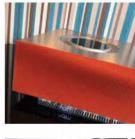
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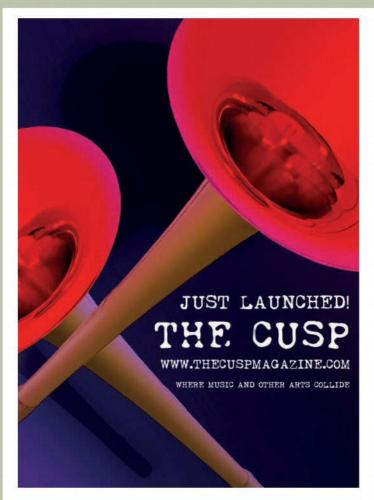






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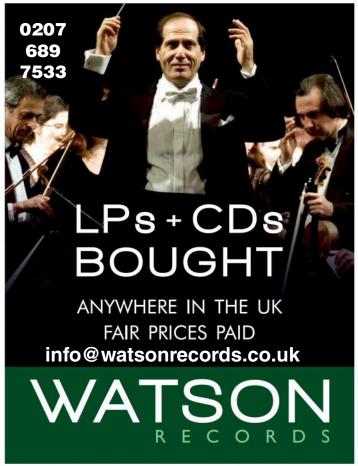
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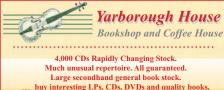
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## NOTES & LETTERS

Peter Shaffer and Klemperer · Sir Adrian Boult and Gerontius · Remembering Paul Juon

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#### Peter Shaffer's Mozart

A rather belated gramophile footnote to Philip Kennicott's excellent and stimulating Mozart 225 survey (October, page 10). Peter Shaffer wrote the famous speech about the Adagio third movement of the Gran Partita, K361, specifically with the uncommonly slow Otto Klemperer recording in mind; this was the recording we used in the first run of the play at the National Theatre in 1979. When Rupert Everett played the part of Salieri in Chichester a couple of years ago, he called me during rehearsal to say that he couldn't make the speech fit the music. I recommended Klemperer; result: magic.

Peter, a former music critic (for *Time and Tide*), was very clear about which performances of the music in the play he wanted. Almost all of the extracts we used were in performances by Karl Böhm, with the exception of Beecham for the finale of Act 1 of *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* (faster, flashier and funnier than anyone else's) and Klemperer's searingly lugubrious *Adagio*. Peter's sense of the effect of music in the theatre was unerring.

Simon Callow London N1

#### Toscanini and new music

The important point about Arturo Toscanini (January, page 10), and his contemporaries such as Leopold Stokowski and Ernest Ansermet, is that these were conductors who were at the forefront of new music when audiences wanted to hear it. There were many new works premiered at last year's BBC Proms concerts but I have to wonder who is going to want to hear any of them again. In my opinion the vast majority were an unlistenable cacophony.

I note that there is a particular interest at the moment in the works of Arnold Schoenberg and his contemporaries but this is not music which often gets into concert hall programmes because people do not want to listen to it. It has been claimed that contemporary composers write the way they do because this is how they are taught by their professors. If this is the case then contemporary composers

## Letter of the Month



The VPO performed Beethoven's Eroica Symphony on the day that Bruno Walter died

### Mourning Bruno Walter?

Having been given the CD of Beethoven's *Eroica* Symphony by the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Hans Knappertsbusch (September, page 45) for Christmas, I see that the date of this broadcast performance was February 17, 1962. This was the day that the conductor Bruno Walter passed away.

I think that I recall hearing this sad news that evening, in which case the musicians would probably have heard it shortly before their broadcast. One can imagine that the Vienna Philharmonic in particular would have felt Bruno Walter's passing quite keenly, and maybe it might have been a factor in the shaping of this *Eroica* performance, but it would need someone with far more expertise than me to judge. The recording is certainly well worth listening to. *Roger Freeman* 

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need to be encouraged to get in touch with their audiences. I suspect that part of the problem is an accent on technique rather than expression. Neither The Beatles nor their main songwriters, Lennon and McCartney, were notable for their technique but they revived popular music at a time when it was moribund. The arts in general have been taken over by image and experiment when they should be concerned with inner integrity.

Thomas E Rookes via email

#### Paul Juon

Ashford, Kent

I enjoyed reading Tim Ashley's review in December (page 93) of Maria Riccarda Wesseling's disc of songs by Paul Juon (on Coviello) and his reference to 'Juon's world'. I was reminded of the Marston set 'The Dawn of Recording' which enables us, most wonderfully, to eavesdrop on that world directly thanks to the Julius Block cylinders. Paul Juon is represented there as both pianist and composer, most notably perhaps in his Berceuse Op 28 No 3 performed by the Chicago-born violinist Eddy Brown,



Felicity Kendall and Simon Callow in Amadeus in the 1979 National Theatre production (see first letter)

accompanied by Julius Block himself, in 1915.

Juon was also a violinist, and his lyrical gift is clear, although on the evidence in the set he doesn't quite deserve the nick-name, mentioned in the Marston notes, of 'the Russian Brahms'. He does seem, however, to have had a most distinguished career, and no doubt Maria Riccarda Wesseling's disc, which I look forward to hearing, will help us assess his music better. A few minutes' Googling reveals that there is already a fairly substantial discography. Stephen Crew via email

#### Serafin and orchestral discs

David Patrick Stearns ('Classics Reconsidered', January page 103) is incorrect in stating that Tullio Serafin's all-Rossini disc (on DG) is his sole orchestral recording. The conductor made a disc of Verdi overtures and preludes in February 1959 as well as a miscellaneous disc of Italian operatic preludes in April 1961. Both were recorded in London by EMI. *Malcolm Walker* 

Editor, Gramophone 1972-79

#### **Boult and Gerontius**

Edward Seckerson's enthusiastic review of Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius*, conducted by Sir Adrian Boult (December, page 91), if anything understates the quality of the performance. I would add to his account the way in which – in what is effectively a semi-staged performance –

the soloists manage to project their roles in a manner which is more opera than oratorio; the wonderful singing of the LPO choir; and the enormous sense of occasion even though there was no audience.

As well as hearing many performances over the years, I am familiar with almost every commercial recording, but none has revealed to me more of what the work is about than this one. Congratulations and thanks to all who made it and its availability possible.

Prof Roger Brown
Via email

#### Christmas ideas

Every December brings another batch of Christmas carol discs. May I suggest two of my favourites to add to the playlist?

The Workers' Carol was written in the 1940s by Morris Martin and Paul Petrocokino. Its second verse has the wonderful lines 'Have you no room who labour on the assembly-line? Mary's son beside you brings his grace to guide you'. Petrocokino's memorable tune is the icing on the Christmas cake.

Reading the review of the Clare College's 'Music for Epiphany' in December (page 98), brings to mind another neglected carol, the Provençal *Marcho di Rei* whose infectious melody Bizet made famous in *L'Arlésienne*.

Choirs casting around for material for next Christmas could consider reviving these delightful carols. Alan Masters Auckland, New Zealand

### **OBITUARIES**

A conductor who recorded with Maria Callas, a superb cellist and a much-loved Brtish pianist

#### GEORGES PRÊTRE

Conductor Born August 24, 1924 Died January 4, 2017



The veteran conductor Georges Prêtre has died at his home in the South West of France; he was 92. He is perhaps best known as the conductor of two of Maria Callas's

late recordings, both made for EMI in 1964: her first of Bizet's *Carmen* and the remake of Puccini's *Tosca*. He also conducted her Paris gala in 1959.

Born in Waziers in the north of France, Prêtre studied at the Paris Conservatoire, harmony with Maurice Duruflé and conducting with André Cluytens. He made his conducting debut at the Opéra de Marseille in 1946, and then at Lyons and Toulouse. His Paris debut followed with Richard Strauss's *Capriccio*, a work that remained close to his heart (and which he would record many years later for Forlane with Dame Felicity Lott as the Countess).

Prêtre was Music Director of the Opéra-Comique from 1955 to '59, and at the Opéra de Paris from 1970 to '71. During the 1960s he made his debuts at Covent Garden, the Met and La Scala, with whom he enjoyed a long relationship (in 1992 he conducted filmed versions of *Cav & Pag* with Domingo at the Milanese house).

He was well known for his advocacy of French music. He conducted the world premiere of Francis Poulenc's La voix humaine (1959) and the Sept répons de ténèbres (1963). Among his many recordings, made mainly for French EMI, were Bizet's Les Pêcheurs de perles (with Cotrubas, Vanzo and Sarabia), Gounod's Faust (with Domingo, Freni and Ghiaurov), Massenet's Werther (with de los Angeles and Gedda), Poulenc's Concerto for organ, timpani and strings (with Duruflé playing the organ), his ballet Les Biches, and the Gloria and Stabat mater. For RCA he recorded Verdi's La traviata with Montserrat Caballé as Violetta, as well as Lucia di Lammermoor with Anna Moffo in the title-role.

Prêtre conducted the New Year's Day Concert from Vienna – the only Frenchman to do so – twice, in 2008 and 2010.

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March 14–16 Round 1

March 17–18 Round 2

March 20-21 Round 3

March 24 Final Round

March 25 Result announcement

Awarding ceremony

Discipline: Piano

Competition Venue: Sunport Hall Takamatsu - Main Hall

#### **Application Period and Deadline:**

1st April 2017 - 20th Sep. 2017 (Postmark is acceptable)

#### **Age limit:**

Individuals born between 1st Jan. 1983 and 1st Jan. 2003



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Susumu AOYAGI [Pianist, Japan]
Jury

Vincenzo BALZANI [Pianist, Italy]
DANG Thai Son [Pianist, Vietnam]
Klaus HELLWIG [Pianist, Germany]
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Daejin KIM [Pianist, Korea]
Piotr PALECZNY [Pianist, Poland]
Mikhail VOSKRESENSKY [Pianist, Russia]

\*The names of the Jury are listed in alphabetical order without their titles.



Member of WFIMC







#### HEINRICH SCHIFF

Cellist and conductor Born November 18, 1951 Died December 23, 2016



The Austrian cellist and conductor has died at the age of 65. A student of André Navarra and Tobias Kühne, Schiff made his debut in 1971. He later studied

conducting with Hans Swarowsky.

As a cellist he made a substantial number of recordings including a much-praised set for EMI of the Bach cello suites, as well as major concertos by Dvořák, Elgar (twice – once under Sir Neville Marriner and again with Sir Mark Elder), Schumann, Lutosławski as well as a range of repertoire from Vivaldi to Bernd Alois Zimmermann.

Ivan March said of Schiff's account of Bach's cello suites that 'the performances are splendidly paced; Bach's linear flow is effortlessly phrased and moves forward with fine spontaneity. Rostropovich has also recorded these supreme cello masterpieces for EMI (6/95), evoking an enormous range of expression, but Schiff's less flamboyant style is every bit as satisfying. Very highly recommended.'

When Schiff recorded the Haydn cello concertos with the Academy of St Martin in the Fields in 1988, Stephen Johnson asked him what he thought about period performance. Schiff replied: 'I have to say that I think music of the Classical period is very much mistreated. Take the Mozart violin concertos. If you hear any of the top ten violinists playing them it's beautiful sound, fine technique, but the style is hopelessly wrong – it's almost a different language. That's Mozart – so what chance have Haydn cello concertos?'

Fellow cellist Natalie Clein chose Schiff as her hero in the April 2005 issue of Gramophone, saying: 'So many of his recordings have become cornerstones for my generation of cellists. His famous Bach suites from the early 1980s are one of the first (and still most beautiful and succesful) attempts to combine "performance-practice" knowledge and modern cello technique. The Lutosławski concerto with the composer conducting is another benchmark recording and the raw cellistic genius that sparkles in the Vieuxtemps, Vivaldi and "encore" discs takes my breath away every time I hear them!'

Among his chamber-music recordings were the Schubert String Quintet with both the Alban Berg and Hagen Quartets, the Brahms First Piano Trio with Viktoria Mullova and André Previn, Beethoven's works for cello and piano with Till Fellner, and duo works with Frank Peter Zimmermann (ECM New Series – 'With state-of-the-art sound, is this the best violin-and-cello duo disc around? I think it might be', we wrote in November 2006).

He was also a great champion of new music and modern composers he performed included Luciano Berio, John Casken, Friedrich Cerha, Michael Gielen, Friedrich Gulda, Hans Werner Henze, Ernst Krenek, Lutosławski, Krzysztof Penderecki, Matthias Pintscher, Wolfgang Rihm, Johannes Maria Staud and Hans Zender

As a conductor he held posts with the Northern Sinfonia (1990-96), Copenhagen PO (1996-2000) and the Vienna CO (2005-08). He recorded extensively, often as a highly sensitive and responsive partner in concertos, including the two Chopin piano concertos with Nikolai Demidenko for Hyperion.

#### ANTHONY GOLDSTONE

Pianist Born July 25, 1944 Died January 2, 2017



The pianist Anthony Goldstone has died at the age of 72. Born in Liverpool, he studied in Manchester and London (with Maria Curcio, a Schnabel pupil). He

made his debut in Manchester with Barbirolli conducting the Royal Manchester College of Music orchestra. His musical tastes were broad and, as well as passion for the byways of the late Romantics, he was a very fine interpreter of Schubert's piano music, as well as that of Mozart and Beethoven – which he recorded extensively for Divine Art. He also championed British music – a 1976 Proms performance of Benjamin Britten's *Diversions* drew warm praise from the composer.

He made a substantial number of fourhand and two-piano recordings with his wife Caroline Clemmow, always recorded on the couple's matching Grotrian-Steinweg instruments at the church of St John the Baptist in Alkborough, North Lincolnshire. Among their most recent projects was the complete Schubert music for four hands. Writing in these pages in November 2004, Bryce Morrison commented that 'For Goldstone and Clemmow Schubert is a composer "especially dear" to their hearts, and this shines out of all their performances.'

## NEXT MONTH MARCH 2017



## Rostropovich's great legacy

A decade after Rostropovich's death, Michael McManus talks to cellists today about how works written for him transformed the instrument's repertoire

### Meeting Harrison Birtwistle

Kate Molleson visits the composer to discuss Stravinsky, his own music, and what it would be like to be a young composer today

### Edgard Varèse's Ameriques

The modernist work offers a vivid depiction of 1920s New York – but which is the recording to own? Philip Clark explores

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Stewart Copeland

The co-founder and drummer of The Police on taming the 'complicated beast' that is the orchestra

My grandmother was a diva at the Paris Opera. My father was a trumpet player – he even played with the Glenn Miller Orchestra on one occasion. But then the war happened and he became a CIA agent. I was born in Langley, Virginia, the headquarters for the CIA, but soon after that I was shipped out to Cairo and then grew up in Beirut.

**Beirut was where** I was introduced to classical music. I heard *Carmina Burana* on the gramophone, and also *La mer* and *Daphnis et Chloé*, plus every form of Stravinsky. Meanwhile, my father was into big-band jazz. He filled the house with instruments, which my siblings ignored. But I'd play them all and my dad noticed: finally, one of his children had the bug!

The Arabic rhythms I encountered really struck me. There's a Lebanese dance where they ignore the first beat and land hard on the three, and every eighth note is an up-chik [an upward-stroke guitar chord played on the offbeat]. Later, I discovered that reggae has the same foundation.

My father was raising me to be a jazz musician, but then I heard Hendrix and everything changed. It was the rage of rock music that appealed. You're 16, you only have three hairs on your chest, your voice is about to break, you feel like you should be master of the universe but you're just a pipsqueak. Drums seemed like a manly instrument to play.

When I went to boarding school in Somerset, I was the only drummer. I was in the school band and they kept firing me for being too loud. It was during this time that I had my first profound musical epiphany. We had our Christmas service at Wells Cathedral and hearing a thousand voices raised in song made me think: this is what music is all about.

There are two kinds of musicians: of the ear, and of the eye. They're separated at birth but there are crossovers (like the brass players who improvise but can also read the dots on the page). Rock musicians use their ears, they make campfire music – that's how music is supposed to be. Classical musicians connect to the music via the visual instructions on the page; with a schematic [score], you can do incredible things.

Composing for film was what took me back to the page. Francis Ford Coppola asked me to write music for his film *Rumble Fish* and the result was a little out of the ordinary. During the process, Francis said to me: "This is all wired and cool and hip, but it needs strings." So 20 guys turned up, and they played their parts so quickly that they were done in an hour. Since then, knowing what these trained musicians can do, I've been reaching into that toolkit more and more.

**Ben-Hur began with** a phone call. I was asked to score an arena production complete with chariot race, horses and thousands of underpaid Ukrainian extras. The show opened



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#### THE RECORD I COULDN'T LIVE WITHOUT

Ravel Le tombeau de Couperin SWR Radio SO, Stuttgart / Denève Hänssler Classic Listening to this feels so good. It has all kinds of paths to follow and, in its blend of simplicity and

complexity, it's almost a precursor to minimalism.

at the O2 and ran its course. Later, my manager told me to check out the 1925 black-and-white silent-film version, made 30 years before the Charlton Heston one – it took two weeks to defrost the celluloid print. I spent two years curating it, and then I had to chop my music to fit.

The orchestra is a complicated beast and there's still so much to learn. I'm not a classical composer, but I use the orchestra to do what I want to do. When the RLPO commissioned me to write a percussion concerto, I was on the programme with some of the greatest British composers: Elgar, Walton, Britten and then my skinny little piece! But I was proud to be on that bill and actually it did pretty well.

At home, I groove along to the radio. I listen to Shirley & Spinoza – they play everything from the Beach Boys to '50s radio plays with concrete music. Budding composers ask me: 'How do I find my own voice?' The answer is, you must open your mind – and listening to eclectic music helps me do that. © Copeland's opera, The Invention of Morel, premieres on February 18 (chicagooperatheater.org); Ben-Hur: A Tale of Christ, featuring Copeland on drums, is next performed on March 6 (konzerthaus.at)

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We also provide tailor-made holidays for independent travellers to over 140 destinations, including short breaks with opera, ballet or concert tickets, to all the great classical cities in Europe.



#### THE KIRKER MUSIC FESTIVAL AT THE GRAND, EASTBOURNE

A THREE NIGHT HOLIDAY | 7 APRIL 2017

We will travel to Sussex in spring 2017 for a new Kirker chamber music festival based at the aptly named Grand Hotel facing the sea in the centre of Eastbourne.

This splendid hotel has every comfort including a spa and an impressive room for our three private concerts. The series of performances will be given by the fast-rising Piatti Quartet, and will be accompanied by a talk by Simon Rowland-Jones on Claude Debussy, who stayed at The

Grand in the summer of 1905.



Price from £,989 per person for three nights including accommodation with breakfast and dinner, three private concerts and talks and the services of the Kirker Tour Leader.

#### THE KIRKER CHOPIN FESTIVAL IN **MALLORCA**

A SIX NIGHT HOLIDAY | 4 MAY 2017

The works of Frédéric Chopin are still central to our Festival in Mallorca and for our fifth visit this spring we will be joined by the Aquinas Piano Trio, Martin Cousin, piano and Oliver Condy, organ.

Based in the village of Banyalbufar, our holiday will introduce you to the glorious unspoilt north coast of Mallorca. There will be visits to the village of Deia, Palma and the villa of San Marroig. Our artists will perform a selection of Chopin pieces, including a recital in the monastery at Valldemossa where Chopin spent three months with his lover the aristocratic Baroness Dudevant, better known as the writer George Sand, and her children in 1838.

Price from £1,795 per person for six nights including flights, accommodation with breakfast, two lunches, six dinners, four concerts all sightseeing and gratuities and the services of the Kirker Tour Leader.



#### THE KIRKER MUSIC FESTIVAL IN SUFFOLK A FOUR NIGHT HOLIDAY | 4 SEPTEMBER 2017

Enjoy three concerts given by the Gould Piano Trio during our third Kirker Music Fesitval in Suffolk. This year's programme includes works by Beethoven, Mozart, Dvorak and local icon Benjamin Britten.

We will stay at Seckford Hall, a magnificent Tudor building set in impressive gardens and located close to Woodbridge. This part of Suffolk has close associations with Benjamin Britten and our programme of sightseeing includes visits to the Red House in Aldeburgh where Britten and Peter Pears lived from 1957 until their deaths, and the magnificent garden created by Giles and Sonia Coode-Adams at their Elizabethan manor house.



Price from £,1,346 for four nights including accommodation with breakfast, four dinners, one lunch, three concerts, all sightseeing and gratuities and the services of the Kirker Tour Leader.

#### THE KIRKER ISCHIA MUSIC FESTIVAL A SEVEN NIGHT HOLIDAY | 9 OCTOBER 2017

Join the Piatti Quartet, tenor Luis Gomes, pianist Carole Presland and violist Simon Rowland-Jones on the idyllic island of Ischia for six exclusive concerts at La Mortella, the former home of Sir William & Lady Walton. We will also enjoy one concert given as part of the Walton Trust's series.

Our concerts are held in the lovely concert hall overlooking the garden, next to the villa where the Waltons lived. We stay at the 4\* Albergo San Montano in the small resort of Lacco Ameno, a few minutes' drive from La Mortella with spectacular views of the Bay of Naples. We include a guided tour of the garden at La Mortella and a half-day sightseeing tour of Ischia.

Price from £,2,256 per person for seven nights including flights, accommodation with breakfast and dinner, seven concerts, all sightseeing, entrance fees and gratuities and the services of the Kirker Tour Lecturer.



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